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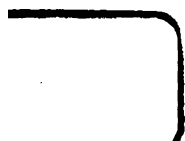
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BROTHERHOOD

MARY CRUGER





Grave

BROTHERHOOD

BY

MARY CRUGER

Author of "HOW SHE DID IT," "HYPERÆSTHESIA," "A
DEN OF THIEVES," ETC.

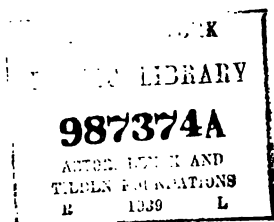
A sacred burden is this life ye bear,
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly,
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly,
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win.

—FRANCES ANNE KEMBLE.

BOSTON

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

A VAIN APPEAL	I
-------------------------	---

CHAPTER II.

A BROTHER'S CRY FOR HELP	II
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MISFORTUNE	21
-----------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

A HAVEN OF REST	31
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

A TREACHERY OF THOUGHT	41
----------------------------------	----

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATEFUL ENCOUNTER	51
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

A FANATIC'S PETITION	63
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK	73
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY	88
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER X.

A ROUGH ENCOUNTER	99
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER XI.

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER . .	110
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

I SHOULD HAVE DIED IN DESPAIR . .	121
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

HE REMEMBERED HIS BROTHER . . .	131
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

FATE'S PERVERSE WAYS	142
--------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XV.

YOUR PEOPLE ARE WITH US TO A MAN . . .	154
----------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WORK OF YOUR BROTHERHOOD . . .	164
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

A CRYING DISGRACE TO THE CAUSE . . .	179
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR	186
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT'S TO BECOME OF US?	198
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XX.

FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP	207
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARK CLOUD'S SILVER LINING	219
----------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW FULL LIFE IS OF MISTAKES	231
----------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT'S RIGHT — THAT'S FAIR	238
--------------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF HUMANITY . . .	248
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

A DESPERATE STRAIT	263
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

FROM THE ASHES OF DEAD HOPES . . .	274
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVII.

WAS IT A MISTAKE? . , . . .	285
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I MUST NOT REST YET	293
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF DEATH	298
------------------------------------	-----

BROTHERHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

A VAIN APPEAL.

We figure to ourselves
The thing we like, and then we build it up
As chance will have it, on the rock or sand.
— HARRY TAYLOR.

BROTHER!" The trumpet tones of the speaker, whose impassioned eloquence had held that rude crowd spell-bound for so long, took a deeper, huskier note, as though a sense of exhaustion was faintly stealing over him. Still his voice rang strongly through the gathering shades of twilight, as he went on, with ever burning zeal.

"Brother!" he repeated, in slower accents.

“Is there a word in all the wide world that appeals so irresistibly to every heart? Think of all it means! Our common humanity—our origin—our destiny—are they not the same? Are not our very heart-throbs measured by the same impulses? Is not the life, whose current courses so subtly in our veins, ever the same—fed by the same aliment, subject to the same influences, threatened by the same dangers? Descended from a common parentage, lying at the appointed time in the one grave earth’s bosom affords, created every one of us in God’s own image, hoping for the one Heaven we look forward to in the next world, how can we be more or less than brothers—brothers in deed and in true faithfulness? Our brotherhood is from God, pure, eternal as the heavens, His own institution. Every distinction that separates man from man, claiming higher place or merit for one over another, is but of our own vain imagining. As brothers we were born into this world, as brothers still we must some day stand before the great judgment-seat. However pure, however sinful, we are brothers, there and forevermore. Away, then, with the fancied line of separation that would crowd a true



soul down into the depths it seeks to rise from, that tries to exalt the vain ones of the earth into an empty grandeur that is of no real value, and to which they have no real title! Sound the strong eternal cry of brotherhood, of true, unyielding faith, through the length and breadth of the land! Let there be but one proud title in all the world that every soul can aim at! To be a man, strong, pure, noble, as God meant him to be, offers the highest glory earth should ever recognize. It is supreme! It is above everything!"

The speaker paused abruptly, turning with a slight gesture of weariness half away from the throng that had so eagerly listened to him. But his burning eyes covertly glanced over their upturned faces, marking with secret exultation the strong emotion which even those stolid features portrayed.

They were evidently country people—farmers, tradesmen, and even mere laborers; but his words had not failed to reach, with more or less force, the intelligence they had startled into unwonted life. Nods of approval, and characteristic words or grunts of appreciation were exchanged in every direction, as the crowd broke up into groups, and

began to glance homeward, through the faint light which was so fast disappearing.

At this moment, a figure that had silently approached toward the close of the harangue, and had stood unobserved beneath the overshadowing branches of a huge oak-tree, came forward with quick steps to where the speaker still stood. The new-comer was of slight, graceful build, displaying, even in that sombre twilight, an evident ease and distinction of mien and dress.

"That was well said, Marchant," he observed, with studied gentleness of tone. "Such a brotherhood is indeed to be desired. To strive for such high aims, to struggle ever upward, is the best any man can do with the abilities God has given him."

He held out his hand as he spoke, while a faint murmur of awed applause broke from those who stood nearest to him.

It seemed to anger even more than it discouraged the first speaker, to see how easily the fickle crowd was swayed by these few words. Half yielding for an instant, to the charm he secretly chafed at, he reluctantly made a movement to grasp the extended hand. Then, in a strong

revulsion of feeling, full of impotent anger at the sense of defeat that crept over him, he dashed it rudely aside, exclaiming with a wild, intense ardor that again drew the people back to their allegiance —

“No! I will not take your hand! It is white and pretty to look at, to those who do not see the dark stains oppression and misgotten ease have left there! But I see deeper. There is no hand, however hardened by toil, however soiled and disfigured by its desperate struggle for bread, I would not sooner grasp than yours!”

- He threw his head back, and surveyed the crowd with a magnetic glance that all felt, and they stirred uneasily beneath its influence. Several, however, who were somewhat more moderate, or perhaps more prudent, shrank irresolutely back, while one man muttered under his breath —

“He didn’t need to speak that way to the master. He’s a fair sort of man enough.”

But Mr. Newbold only laughed lightly as he let the rejected hand fall carelessly by his side, saying half mockingly, as he sauntered away —

“Well, good-night, friends! It is getting late.”

“Brother!”

A soft, sweet, but unutterably sad voice spoke this word in timid appeal in his ear, as he passed beyond sight and sound of the dispersing crowd, and was taking his way homeward, in the fast deepening shade.

Mr. Newbold paused, folding his arms across his breast, with an air of great self-restraint as he said in low, stern tones —

“Whom do you dare address by that name? Have I not forbidden?” —

“Oh, no, brother!” interrupted the feeble, drooping creature that almost crouched before him, while an hysterical cry of mingled pain and dread broke from her lips. “I have suffered so much!” she went on drearily. “Have a little pity! You used, once to be so good to me.”

“And how did you repay me?” he asked, bitterly. “Can you dare ask for help now? But let us not waste words. Once more, let me tell you that the folly of your own act has separated us forever. I have no words, no pity, for the wife of” —

“Hush!” she cried with frenzied eagerness. “Don’t say cruel things of the dead!”

“Is he dead?” rejoined Mr. Newbold, turning

to regard her more attentively, while a faint inflection of relenting came into his voice, and he went on almost eagerly, "You are free, then, from that mad entanglement! The world has fortunately known little of it. If I could forgive" — he added, doubtingly.

"I have only my child!" murmured the hapless woman, shrinking from him with a shudder as though she faintly comprehended what was in his thought.

"Your child!" he repeated, impatiently. "I had not heard of that!"

"I did not think to tell you" — she began.

"Why should you?" he interrupted, roughly; "what would I care to know of its birth?" Then seeming to make a quick mental survey of the situation, and to come to a sudden resolution, he went on somewhat eagerly. "I never thought to speak to you, to look on your face again; but Providence has saved you from the worst of your fate. Come back, if you will, to the old home, to your brother's love and care again, and let all this bitter past be forgotten and buried out of sight."

He held out his hands to her, nothing doubting

she would gladly creep into the welcome refuge of his arms. But for a second time that night his offered greeting met with no response. His arms fell again to his side, and his teeth were silently ground together in pained rebuff, as his companion looking imploringly in his face, retreating half a step, while she said persistently—

“But my child!”

“You must give it up,” he replied, with grim determination. “I will see it is comfortably cared for; but only as Meta Newbold, as my sister,” he added more tenderly, “can you come back to the home, on whose hearthstone still lingers the shadow of the disgrace you brought there.”

The woman looked down gloomily a moment. Then raising her eyes with a flash of defiance, she said, sharply—

“Do you know why I followed you this evening? Do you know I have no longer a roof to shelter my head—nor a morsel of food for myself or my child?”

“So much the better!” he rejoined, curtly. “For your own, for the child’s sake, you cannot refuse”—

“Listen to me!” she interrupted, vehemently.

"I have not for days had more than a few crumbs that a kind-hearted workingman bestowed to keep me from starvation. I have walked many a weary mile, trying to find occupation, but in vain. I am foot-sore, worn out, exhausted in soul and body, a poor helpless creature. And now," she went on, with increasing wildness, "now in my dire need, look how I am tempted! You would buy my soul with the soft raiment, the dainty food and luxury of former days. Only my child—a poor puny mite of a thing—stands in the way. Such a trifling difficulty—isn't it?" and she laughed so discordantly that Mr. Newbold shivered, in sudden dread that she was losing her senses.

"Take time to think of it, Meta!" he said soothingly. "You must see the wisdom, after due reflection"—

"Oh, yes!" she interrupted; "I'll take time to think; but not time, not eternity, will ever shut a mother's heart against her own child!"

With a sudden gliding motion, she passed in an instant out of his sight; and as he stood, trying to discern her light form among the trees, he fancied her mocking laugh still echoed among them.

Not quite so confident of his wisdom nor so proud of his self-reliant strength, as he had been but a few moments since, Ralph Newbold went soberly on to the home, where Meta's sweet presence was still so bitterly longed for.

CHAPTER II.

A BROTHER'S CRY FOR HELP.

By all thy nature's weakness,
Hidden faults and follies known,
Be thou, in rebuking evil,
Conscious of thine own.

WHITTIER.

THE speaker at that woodland gathering, was George Marchant, a man of unusual brain-power and intelligence, who had achieved a fair education by pure force of dogged determination, and had also acquired a command of language that was wonderfully effective. His influence was the greater that he had not of late years belonged to that immediate neighborhood, where his boyhood had been passed; and he thus more deeply impressed the sturdy work-people, who, listening to his stirring words, regarded him almost as a prophet, divinely sent to win them to better things, and to arouse them to higher achievements. The force of habit and association, however, still

kept them from breaking with the employer on whose lands they dwelt, and whose purse-strings contained their livelihood. Recognizing this fact with bitter, unavailing resentment, feeling that, however much he might awaken in them vague aspirations for greater independence, they always fell back with exasperating contentedness into the old grooves again, George Marchant had permitted himself to indulge in that moment's unwise defiance of Mr. Newbold's power, only to regret it bitterly as he walked moodily away. He was too quick-witted not to see his mistake, and to note its effect on some of the keener minds about him.

Then came a light touch on his arm from a quickly withdrawn hand, as a gruff, sullen voice said, with an evident effort at unaccustomed pleading —

“Brother!”

The word rang strangely in his ears, awakening a host of bewildering memories.

“Who are you? What do you want?” he asked, shrinking alike from the word, and the associations it called up.

“You who speak so glibly of brotherhood ought not to disavow your own flesh and blood!” replied

his companion, trying to assume an air of bravado, but evidently ill at ease, and fearful of repulse.

A passionate murmur that was almost a curse broke from George Marchant's lips, as he involuntarily clenched his fist under cover of the darkness, and angrily faced the newcomer.

"How dare you!" he cried savagely, with bitter menace in his tones. "How dare you come before me again? Have you no care for your life, man?"

"George Marchant won't kill his own brother quite so fast!" returned the other hotly; "he'd better not try."

"What else do you deserve, but to be struck down like a dog?" cried Marchant fiercely.

"Not by your hands!" said his companion with grim significance, seeming to be driven by pure spite into provoking Marchant to the utmost, as he added, with a sneer, "If any one would be safe with you, it ought to be Polly's husband."

"Hush, you scoundrel!" cried George Marchant, his face all aflame with passion. "Don't remind me of that — don't imagine I have forgotten how you robbed me of all I cared for, and ruined all my life!"

"You've made a pretty good thing of it after all, it seems to me!" returned the other carelessly. "Men speak of you"—

"Never mind that! Tell me in one word what you want! It's not best, or safest, for you to stand here parleying with me, I can tell you."

"I want your help!" returned the other, with abrupt defiance that scarcely concealed his great uneasiness of manner.

"Help for what—to hang yourself?" roughly enquired George Marchant, turning impatiently away.

"No; to keep myself out of that danger from other hands!"

"What have you been doing?" and George Marchant's voice was suddenly husky and tremulous with dread.

"Nothing, of course!" said his brother hastily; "but some fool got knocked on the head the other day, and they are trying to make out"—

"A murderer!" groaned George, with ashen lips.

"On my word, no!" said the other, earnestly. "I've a good many stains on my hands, but not that of blood. Do believe me, George"—

"It's no use, John!" said George Merchant mournfully. "You've brought nothing but sorrow and disgrace to me since you were a boy. I won't stand in the way of justice, even for a brother. Go your ways. I'll not help you again — now nor ever."

There seemed a faint touch of menace in his tones that startled his hearer with fresh alarm.

"You won't dare to betray me?," he asked nervously, as he crept nearer to his brother in the fast increasing darkness.

"No!" returned George Marchant curtly, as he again turned away.

"Give me at least a few dollars—for Polly's sake!" abjectly entreated his brother, following him with cringing movements.

"For her use, you mean?" cried George hotly.

"Yes; to help us and our little girl to get away to foreign parts!"

George Marchant's strong features were convulsed with passion for a moment, and it seemed as if he could not forbear striking the wretch before him to the ground. Then with a swift revulsion of feeling, he drew his pocket-book from his breast, almost threw it at his brother's feet,

and walked rapidly away, not daring to trust himself longer in that hateful presence. He never guessed, as he congratulated himself on having offered his brother no actual violence, how great a danger he had himself escaped, in thus voluntarily surrendering what would else have been taken from him with harmful force.

Reaching his quiet lodgings presently, worn and weary with the reaction after such strong and varied excitement, he threw himself in a chair muttering gloomily—

“Would any one believe, of those who heard me speak so hopefully of universal brotherhood, that I could be so hard with one of my own kin? Am I wrong? Is nature too strong for principle always? What else could I have done? How could I pardon even a repentant sinner who had so wronged me—and this one so hardened a criminal?”

His head drooped on his hands, and he thought long and intently over the knotty problem. Then, with a hard, cynical smile, he got up and paced slowly to and fro.

“No!” he exclaimed in low, yet audible tones, and throwing his head back defiantly. “All this

evil, all this crime is the result of the world's erroneous mode of living. If all had equal rights, if the wealth and the joys of existence were shared by all, what temptation would there be to sin or wrong? All our desires would be pure, all our aims elevated above the earthly needs among which our souls now grovel. We would all tend heavenward, the strong guiding the weak, and we would thus arrive day by day nearer perfection."

He stood a moment by the open window as he spoke, seeking the cool touch of the evening air on his heated brow.

From the darkness below echoed a mocking laugh, and a voice which had a strangely familiar tone, though he could not recognize it, uttered in a low, distinct whisper —

"If the demon, love, did not get things all mixed up again."

"Who are you?" demanded George, leaning out of the window and peering into the darkness in a vain attempt to discover the speaker.

"One who knows!" came back the answer, floating up to him through the shadows with provoking clearness. "Equal rights are all very nice; but some things, such as a woman's love,

are indivisible. You cannot share that very comfortably."

George drew back and shut the window down, with very unmistakable rage. Amid all the rattling noise it made, he could still distinguish the faint laugh that died away as his tormentor walked down the road, whistling defiantly as he went.

Again George Marchant threw himself into a seat and gave himself up to deep reflection. But this little incident changed the current of his thoughts, and long silent memories came trooping up from the dark past he had vainly struggled to forget. Once more, as merry school-boys, he saw his brother and himself frolicking through storm and sunshine, ever one in all their sports, full of the same zeal to acquire knowledge, to press forward in advance of their rustic comrades. Never a shadow came between them, never a thought or hope was unshared, till little Polly Martin, so long their pet playmate, grew into rosy girlhood. Then the insidious tempter evolved from the simple love that filled both their hearts for the pretty maiden, bitter envious thoughts, and deep brooding jealousy that all too quickly bore fatal fruit of discord.

John Marchant's keener wit and less scrupulous mind easily achieved the coveted victory. At once winning the artless girl's fancy by the glowing picture he drew of their future together, and persuading the fond father, whose feeble limbs were already trembling on the very borders of the grave, to trust his thrifty savings into his hands, he boldly bore away both fortune and bride without a moment's warning, from his brother's startled vision. It was a bitter blow to George—one from which he never recovered. As time passed, and he saw his father sink sorrowing into his grave, moaning ever after his lost boy, never caring that George was far the greatest loser; as he heard rumors of cruel neglect that befell poor Polly, of more frequent and greater hazards of crime and disgrace for John; as he felt keenly the personal loss that left him to struggle unaided and alone with grief and privation, what wonder that his lips breathed a vow of unsparing vengeance against the destroyer of his peace? And yet it was a brother—his only brother—who had been the dear companion of his early boyhood! Still his heart never softened toward him, never cherished thought of forgiveness or amity for the

despoiler. He had had need to struggle with himself but now, not to strike and fiercely trample under foot the sin-stained wretch, who dared to call him brother; who could ask for help so audaciously in Polly's name. Only for her, only as his heart ached at thought of her piteous need, had he relented far enough to cast his scantily filled purse so disdainfully at his brother's feet. But it was in bitter, unforgiving resentment that he did it.

CHAPTER III.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MISFORTUNE.

Life treads on life, and heart on heart,
We press too close in church and mart,
To keep a dream or grave apart.

— E. B. BROWNING

IN the first impulse of pained excitement, Meta had fled, with rapid steps, from her brother's presence. But she was too weak, from want of food and from recent illness, to keep up that wild pace. Breathless and sobbing with weariness and despair, she presently sank down at the foot of some trees on the further edge of the woods, just in sight of the twinkling lights of the village beyond.

Here she lay moaning for some moments, not hearing or heeding the murmur of distant voices, nor even softly approaching footsteps till some one gruffly said —

"How now! What's all this taking on about?"

Startled and half frightened, Meta raised herself into a sitting position, shrinking with alarm as she looked fearfully into the dark face that bent over her.

"Ye needn't shiver so, lass!" continued the man; "I wouldn't harm ye. I've no grudge against one so needy as ye seem to be."

Meta's cheeks flamed as she felt that even in that dim light, he could discern her worn and insufficient attire, and trace the sharp outlines of her meagre face and form.

"I do not fear you!" she said, with an assumption of bravery she was far from feeling, for the evil expression of his face was distinct enough to arouse apprehension even in her despairing heart.

"Ye look sore pined, lass!" pursued the man, speaking in almost pitying tones now. "Have ye no friends or home that ye lie here on the ground, at this late hour?"

"Friends! home!" she echoed, with a mirthless laugh. "What are they worth when they fleet away in our sorest need?"

"There ought not to be such need in this peaceful neighborhood!" returned the man, with

a scarce concealed sneer. "Those were brave words I heard but now, from your great apostle of brotherhood. Is there no help from such as he for your necessities?"

"I have not asked it," returned Meta proudly, as she feebly rose again to her feet, and took a step toward the village.

"Stay, lass!" cried the man hastily, seeking to detain her by a touch from which she instinctively shrank. "Nay, I wouldn't harm you," he repeated impatiently. "I'm in sore trouble myself; but I've never been quite in need of a day's victuals. I'm in luck, too, just now, for the matter of that, and can afford to do ye a friendly turn. Here, take this!" and he dropped some pieces of silver in her listless hand.

"Why should you do this?" she asked, drawing back and regarding him suspiciously. "I have not sought your charity."

"No; but you need it! Don't flare up, lass," he added soothingly. "I mean no harm to you. It's a rare thing for one of my sort to help a poor creature like you. I don't know that I ever did it before!" he went on, with a hard laugh. "Don't cast it back in my teeth, lass!"

Meta regarded him as searchingly as she could in the failing light. Then, with a weary sigh, her fingers closed instinctively over the coveted coins she knew not how to relinquish, as she said brokenly.

"I can't afford to do that! You don't know what it is to see a little one perishing for food, and not a morsel to give it!"

"You are married, then—a slip of a girl like you!" exclaimed her companion, in surprise.

"My husband is dead," said Meta, coldly, with a sudden impulse of reserve.

"Well, I, too, have a young one to look after," said the man, in rough but kindly tones. "It may be, some day when she no longer has me to care for her, some good soul will help her, even as I do this little for you."

His face softened wonderfully as he spoke; and a sudden sense of gratitude prompted Meta to say warmly as she looked with more confidence at him—

"It is the brotherhood of misfortune that makes you so kind to me.* Well, I will take your alms thankfully, and if brighter days ever come to me, it may be that even my hand will

have power to help you. Tell me your name and your little girl's, that I may never forget what I owe you."

The man drew back with a crafty, cautious glance.

"No," he said abruptly; "I will not give my name. It's not one to boast of, any way. If you can ever do George Marchant a good turn, it'll make us quits."

"George Marchant!" she repeated, in a bewildered tone.

"Yes; it's his money I've given you. I am but the dispenser of his charity," returned the man, tossing the purse in the air as he spoke, and turning away as he caught it, with such a rapid movement that he was out of sight among the trees before Meta could speak again.

Looking wistfully after him, and then regarding almost fondly the precious store in her hand, Meta sped with swift hopefulness down the open slope to the little cottage where she had left her child in a good woman's care, while she ventured on her fruitless errand to her brother.

Here she found the infant feebly wailing for her, while the woman who held it was trying to

comfort it, at the same time that she was saying to a grave, quiet looking man in clerical dress who stood by—

“Indeed, sir, it’s a very sad case! The poor thing needs care and food herself, bad enough—oh, here she is now!” drawing back with instinctive respect as Meta entered.

With jealous dread of their intent, Meta at once took the puny infant in her arms, hushing its moaning tenderly on her breast, as she gazed almost defiantly in the faces that so pitifully regarded her.

The woman said hastily, as though fearing Meta’s possibly imprudent speech—

“It’s the good minister, ma’am, wanting to know if he could do aught for ye or the child.”

“Will he help us?” asked Meta scornfully. “Will he give us food and lodging for naught but the poor thanks which are all I can give in return?”

“Mrs. Burton spoke of your wish for work,” he said gently. “I will help you in any way you wish, however,” he added, taking a slender purse from his pocket as he spoke.

“No; I do not ask charity,” said Meta proudly,

displaying at the same moment the coins she still held. "Give me work, anything I can do," she added, regarding her wasted fingers disdainfully.

"Skill need not depend on strength," said the clergyman, smiling with an air of amused encouragement. "If you can sew" —

"Oh, yes!" cried Meta, her face lighting up with piteous eagerness as she spoke; "I can do all sorts of sewing and fine embroidery. Only try me."

"Will you mind going to a distance?" he asked, watching intently her flushed, agitated features as he went on. "I have a sister near Fairfield, who could give you plenty of work of all sorts."

"But my child!" cried Meta with sudden dread, as she clasped it more fondly to her breast. "I cannot give up my child!"

"Certainly not! How could I be so unfeeling as to ask it?" he replied with an approving nod. "My sister has a little cottage on the place where you could have a room to yourself, and keep your little one very comfortably."

"And you offer me all this?" asked Meta with a hysterical sob. "Do you know what I had thought of doing but a short hour ago?"

As he only looked with grave questioning on her, she went on passionately —

“All the world was against me — even a brother’s heart was no longer open to me! It seemed as if only death would be merciful.”

“Hush!” said the clergyman sternly. “You forget we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. He who saved our souls from eternal death, wills that we seek to save each other from this world’s pains and griefs. I only ask, for my sister’s assurance, your name, and your pledge of personal worthiness.”

“I am a widow,” returned Meta, abashed by his reproof. “Has not Mrs. Burton told you?”

“Only that your husband was one she had known — Robert Aberley.”

“As good and worthy a soul as ever lived!” interjected Mrs. Burton, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, and nodding her head repeatedly in vehement endorsement of her assertion.

The clergyman felt puzzled for a moment. Robert Aberley had evidently been but little, if at all, above Mrs. Burton’s own station in life; while, through all Meta’s poverty-stricken appearance, there still shone an air of gentle breeding,

a refined grace of mien and speech that could not be mistaken. True, as a seamstress among persons of high birth, she might have acquired all this; still, he shook his head doubtfully, as he said gravely—

“Well, I need ask no more. Your marriage is recorded in the parish register, I suppose?”

“No; we were not married here,” said Meta briefly, closing her lips with ominous firmness, while her eyes gleamed defiantly for an instant.

But the clergyman did not observe this; and seeing no need for further questioning of the poor waif who had thus drifted under his wing, he contented himself with giving a few brief directions how to reach his sister.

“Come to the Rectory to-morrow,” he said in conclusion, “and I will give you a note to Mrs. Rainsford. You will need some things,” he added, glancing discreetly at her worn apparel.

“No, no!” cried Meta, with a sudden flush of shame. “I have enough to procure all I require, and to pay my way.”

“Then I will leave you to rest. You look as if you had need of it,” he replied, glancing back as he passed through the doorway to think what a

pretty picture the young mother made, in all her picturesque woefulness of attire. The tender grace of her attitude, her glowing, tremulous face bent so lovingly over the tiny infant, the hopeful, ardent gleam in her eyes, so eloquent of her new-found, grateful joy, made a picture indeed, that amid many a day's prosaic surrounding followed Arthur Manning with a comforting sense of pleasure and self-gratulation. It was not often in his ministrations among the poor, that the relief he supplied was so tangibly a benefit, and its recognition so spontaneously sweet. He was more used to grudgingly spoken thanks; to have his best efforts scrutinized with jealous closeness.

CHAPTER IV.

A HAVEN OF REST.

We see but dimly through the mists and vapors;
Amid these earthly damps
What seem to us but sad, funereal tapers
May be Heaven's distant lamps.

—LONGFELLOW.

META ABERLEY, journeying with a trembling, half-hopeful heart toward Fairfield, pondered dreamily over the bitter, cruel past, hardly daring as yet to believe that cheerier days were indeed coming. Still it was, at least, a temporary alleviation of her woe, to be going among strangers with a definite prospect of shelter and rest. Confident in her own ability to sustain herself and her child, she had but asked of fate the boon of mere opportunity; and now, with no fear of mocking inquiry, no cause to dread the gibes

and jeers of scornful hearts, she felt that repose of mind as well as body were before her.

The hapless girl had taken very early in life the irrevocable step that had so implacably turned her brother's heart against her. Ralph had no pity for her piteous grief, no remembrance of the carelessness of results that had thrown the simple-minded Meta in Robert Aberley's way. Yet they had themselves been playmates, and in some sort friends, all through their boyhood. Robert, though only the son of Squire Newbold's agent at his extensive factories, had nevertheless had very much the same outward training as Ralph himself. Side by side, in the same school, they had contended with boyish ardor for prizes and supremacy; never less sincerely friends for the rivalry in which Ralph nearly always was the victor. When boyhood ended, however, and Ralph was sent away to college, this intimacy was broken up, never to be entirely resumed. But for the fancy the old Squire took to young Aberley, and the mistaken idea he formed of pleasing his own boy by kindness to his friend, they might never indeed have met again, for the agent had died before Ralph's return, and his widow had gone

far away among her own kinsfolks. The Squire, however, took Robert into his house, proposing to perfect his education in business lines, by giving him his books and accounts to keep, as well as by making use of his clear voice and young eyes to read the daily papers to him in the evening. Thus, there were many hours in which the youth would have been left solitary indeed, had not Meta, scarcely yet beyond the bounds of childhood, and full of girlish innocence and unworldly aspirations, been so unavoidably made his companion; and it was not to be wondered at that a stronger regard than mere friendship gained a footing in her heart.

The Squire's sudden death just as Ralph's college course was ended, recalled him home to take charge of all his father's varied and extensive concerns, while manhood's crown scarcely yet sat firmly on his brow. For a while, he was glad to have Aberley's aid in arranging his affairs, and in forming a clear idea of their nature and demands. But he was at once overpowered with anger and surprise, when the youth diffidently accosted him one day, declaring the love which had grown in his own and Meta's heart for each other. Ralph

Newbold repulsed him with scorn and contemptuous reproaches for his presumption. He would not listen to one word that pleaded for his sister's happiness, but drove Robert Aberley, as it were, headlong from the house whose roof had sheltered him so long.

A stormy scene with Meta had followed; and Ralph had exulted in the power his father's will gave him, to withhold from her all share in the property, if she did not marry with his approval. In his rage, he had stormed at and threatened the gentle yet spirited girl, when a few words of loving persuasion might have won her at least to patience and outward submission. As it was, the two delinquents, outraged in their most sacred feelings, angered by his violent opposition, and provoked beyond endurance by his bitter scorn, very naturally took the matter into their own hands, and fled to unite their fate beyond his reach.

A brief day of happiness, indeed, was vouchsafed them. The delicate, boyish husband, never accustomed to the rude breath of adversity, or the buffets of the outside world, had perished helplessly and miserably in less than a year after his

ill-starred marriage. He had no stamina of mind or body to meet ill-fortune and privation; and he weakly yielded to the fate he knew not how to resist.

Poor Meta, hurried from one disaster to another, scarcely had realized her husband's death or her child's birth, in all the misery of that cruel time, till she awoke from her stupor of grief and bewilderment to find herself alone in the world with her hapless infant, not knowing where to shelter her head, or to find food to keep life in her shivering body.

Once more spurned by the brother, whose aid she had sought most of all for her child's sake, and finding in her extremity warmer hearts among utter strangers than with her own kith and kin, Meta, with a long sigh of weariness, felt now that she might dare to put aside, perhaps forever, that dreary memory of pain and suffering, and look forward to a new and brighter life.

As the train stopped at Fairfield, she gathered her sleeping child more closely to her breast, and taking up the modest little valise which contained her few belongings, she alighted with manifest nervousness, as she wondered how she was to

reach Mrs. Rainsford's house. But thoughtful Arthur Manning had telegraphed to his sister of her coming, and before she had taken one bewildered step on the platform, a pleasant-faced middle-aged woman accosted her with —

“Are you Mrs. Aberley, ma'am?”

Meta, in mute shyness, only bowed her head, her large eyes filling with sudden tears, as she fixed a wistful, pleading glance on the speaker which was irresistibly touching.

“There, there!” continued the woman, bustling about in a cheery, good-natured fashion, to give Meta time to recover herself; “I’m just the housekeeper, you know, Mrs. Ward,” she went on briskly. “Mrs. Rainsford has some friends staying with her that she couldn’t leave, or she’d have come to meet you herself. Now, if you’ll tell me where your baggage — ah!” she continued in almost the same breath, as she saw Meta’s shame-faced glance at her valise, “that’s all you’ve brought with you, I see. Well, it’s best not to be overburdened with such traps. Come, here’s the carriage waiting for us, and you’ll be glad of a rest and a cup of tea, I’ll warrant.”

In another moment, they were rolling swiftly

over the smooth road, in an easy carriage, whose swift, luxurious motion was delicious to Meta's weary, emaciated form, as it lay contentedly back among the cushions. She answered but in monosyllables to Mrs. Ward's good-natured garrulity, scarcely hearing, in fact, her long-winded account of the family arrangements at Belmont, Mrs. Rainsford's place. Presently, they drove through a heavy gateway whose arched entrance was one mass of luxuriant vines, and sweeping over an admirably kept road for a short distance, stopped at a pretty little cottage, half hidden by the roses and honeysuckles in which it was embowered.

As Meta looked up with an air of surprise Mrs. Ward said blithely, as she stepped heavily to the ground and turned to help Meta descend —

"Come, my dear — I mean, Mrs. Aberley — how my tongue do run on, to be sure! This is to be your home, you know. The gardener and his wife live here; and you're to have two nice rooms all to yourself on the first floor. I've been down myself this morning to see that everything is comfortable for you, and you'll find it just the cosiest little place you ever was in."

"But Mrs. Rainsford," said Meta, "Ought I not to see her"—

"Why, bless your soul! I told you before—don't you remember? You're to have a good rest, and she'll come down to-morrow morning to talk about the work."

"Did you? I didn't notice—yes, it is better," said Meta, with a quick sense of relief. She had been secretly dreading the first encounter with Mrs. Rainsford; and in all her weariness and languid sense of reaction after such varied excitements, she felt completely unfit for any further exertion now.

"You'll find Wilkins and his wife real good, worthy people," whispered Mrs. Ward, as they passed through the little rustic gate.

As she spoke the door opened and a stout, rosy woman came down the steps to meet them.

"You're welcome, ma'am," she said simply, with an old-fashioned courtesy, as she took the valise from Mrs. Ward.

Meta murmured faintly some words of thanks, but she was too worn out to make much effort now.

The rooms set apart for her use were indeed

neat and attractive; and after the hardships and privations she had endured for so many months, they seemed a very haven of rest.

The front room, which had two sunny, cheerful windows, was simply furnished, but in very good taste; while the other, with its comfortable sleeping arrangements, and its pretty view, through the shaded vistas of the park, was wonderfully homelike.

Mrs. Ward could not tear herself away from her congenial task of petting her new protégée, to whom she had taken a wonderful fancy, without insisting on helping her to take off her bonnet and mantle, and even to partially unpack the valise. A nameless instinct, however, prevented her from letting her officious zeal border in the least on familiarity; and without being conscious of it, her manner observed always the touch of respect and deference that Meta's pale, high-bred features seemed to command. Even her low-voiced thanks, almost humble as they were in tone, showed a culture of thought and feeling that Mrs. Ward was too shrewd not to recognize.

Leaving the poor, tired girl to lie down at last and rest awhile, after having seen that the cup

of tea, and nicely-prepared bread and butter which Mrs. Wilkins had ready for her were duly partaken of and enjoyed, Mrs. Ward hastened to report her proceedings to her mistress. Her account excited the liveliest surprise and interest in Mrs. Rainsford, who had never supposed the seamstress her brother had sent her was other than some village dress-maker, and she was thus inspired with much impatience for the next morning's interview with her new employée.

CHAPTER V.

A TREACHERY OF THOUGHT.

There's no dearth of kindness
In this world of ours;
Only in our blindness
We gather thorns for flowers.

— MASSEY.

THE sun had set, and the lengthening shadows filled the room with an obscure twilight when Meta woke from that profound slumber. A sense of strangeness and desolation crept over her, as she looked round the unfamiliar room, and felt how utterly alone in the world she was. She could almost have wept in stormy grief and despair as she realized this; but even as a faint sob broke from her thin, quivering lips, the door softly opened and a flood of pleasant light scattered the dark shadows as Mrs. Wilkins placed a

lighted lamp on the table in the sitting-room, and came softly to the open doorway of her own room.

"I beg pardon, ma'am!" she said apologetically, twisting her apron nervously in her hands as she spoke; "I knocked first, but you didn't hear me."

"I was asleep!" muttered Meta, shading her heavy eyes from the dazzling light.

"Law me! and I've gone and wakened you!" cried the good woman, in real distress at this.

"No; it's best for me to rouse up, and get things in some order," said Meta, dragging herself into a sitting posture as she spoke, and pushing her disordered hair back from her brow.

"To be sure! and I've a nice supper all ready for you, too. You must be sore pined with hunger by this time."

"I don't know—yes—I am hungry," replied Meta with more animation, as she started to her feet.

Leaving her child still asleep on the bed, Meta came into the sitting-room, and watched Mrs. Wilkins with curious interest, as she brought in and arranged on the table a really tempting little supper of broiled chicken, some fresh, home-made

bread and butter, and another supply of strong, fragrant tea.

She ate with more appetite than she had done for many a long day. Amid all her privations, grief and anxiety had rendered her far less keen for food than would have otherwise been natural; but now, in her new sense of being sheltered and secure, her taste for food came back with renewed zest. After the meal was over, she idled a little about the rooms, now resting, now arranging the contents of her valise in the bureau drawers till at last, at a very early hour she went to bed, full of a delicious drowsiness she was only too glad to yield to.

Far into the bright, sunny morning, Meta continued to enjoy that sweet, dreamless sleep, and strangely transforming was its blest influence. Dressing leisurely after a refreshing bath, and taking unwonted pains with her simple toilet in view of the approaching interview with Mrs. Rainsford, she made a very pretty picture as she sat in the arm-chair by the open window, waiting for Mrs. Wilkins to bring her breakfast. Her soft brown hair fell in little rings on her forehead, partly concealing the hollow temples, while the

rest of its rich masses was coiled in a soft twist over the top of her shapely head. Her simple black calico dress, cheap and humble as was its material, neatly fitted her slight figure, while the little frill at her throat softened the dark outline of her dress. On her lap lay the tiny infant, nearly three months old, but looking as if it had not known as many days of existence, so puny was it. There was in its small face a strange look of thoughtfulness which sat oddly on its baby outlines. Its dress of almost coarse muslin, yet white and clean as hands could make it, looked clumsy in contrast to the dainty features; yet even the poverty it betokened wore an air of refinement that was unmistakeable.

Mrs. Wilkins, as she came in with the breakfast, paused as she caught sight of the mother and child by the window.

"Land's sake!" she muttered to herself; "how mortal sweet-looking she be, sure enough! A good night's rest has been the making of her, surely."

Again, Meta came with glad contentment to partake of the simple yet toothsome meal the good woman had provided. It was such a delight-

ful novelty to have food placed before her that was at once good and plentiful, without any effort or anxiety on her part to procure it. She was still leisurely enjoying it when the sound of bright, laughing voices floated through the open window, and made her start nervously.

"Don't be frightened!" said Mrs. Wilkins, as she came a little hastily into the room. "It's only some of the quality folks up at the house as have walked down with the mistress. They won't come in, howsomever; and they're a ways off yet. Now, do take a little more of your breakfast."

"No; I've had enough," said Meta hurriedly, as she rose with deepening pallor and approached the window. "Shall I stay here?" she continued, as Mrs. Wilkins was gathering together the breakfast things."

"Surely, yes," was the reply in surprised tones. "You'd not want to face all them folks, and the mistress will like best to come in."

The party, whose voices had preceded their arrival, now stood at the gate, and on the tranquil morning air came snatches of light jests and mirthful exclamations that grated painfully on Meta's overstrained sensitiveness. Leaning back

in her chair, she closed her eyes in a moment's agonized prayer for strength and self-control, looking as she lay there so sweet and yet so fragile, that Mrs. Rainsford, standing unobserved in the open doorway, felt her whole heart go out in a flood of pity for the lonely wanderer.

Coming forward with noiseless steps, she stood by Meta's side, saying softly —

"I hope you are feeling more rested this morning, Mrs. Aberley."

At sound of that grave yet kindly voice, Meta looked up with such a piteous appeal for aid and protection in her tearful eyes, that Mrs. Rainsford bent over her, taking her hands into her own warm, earnest clasp, as she added —

"You must not be shy or nervous with me, my child. Any one my brother sends to me as he did you, has my warmest interest at once. Only tell me what I can do, how best I can meet your wishes."

"He is so good!" murmured Meta, struggling to preserve her composure. "I have been in great trouble since my husband" —

"There, don't try to tell me now," interrupted Mrs. Rainsford, seeing how dangerous to Meta's

attempted calmness the undertaking seemed to be. "Some of these days you shall tell me as much or as little as you like; but for the present I want you to rest and get strong. You can do fine sewing and embroidery, Arthur tells me?"

"I always did all my own work as a girl," began Meta.

"As a girl? You don't look much more than a child now!" exclaimed Mrs. Rainsford, secretly wondering what her position and surroundings must have been to make her "own work" come under the head of fine sewing and embroidery.

"I meant before I was married," replied Meta, with a sad smile; "I am nearly twenty now, though I don't look it."

"Poor girl! You don't, indeed! Well, as I said before, take a good rest, and in a few days I will see what work I have for you. Do you think you will like to stay here with Mrs. Wilkins? It was Arthur's idea on account of your child; but if you would rather be at the house" —

"Oh, no!" interposed Meta eagerly; "I think this is delightful; only it seems too good, too kind."

"I beg pardon!" said a soft, silvery voice from

the doorway; "I hope I am not disturbing you, Cousin Margaret, but we were talking of" —

Mrs. Rainsford looked up rather impatiently at this. A tall, queenly looking woman of about twenty-five, to whom raven tresses, dark brunette complexion, and flashing black eyes gave almost a Spanish air, stood at the open door, gazing curiously at the little group by the window. She was very richly dressed in black lace, through whose meshes gleamed golden sparkles here and there. Her regular features wore an air of calm repose, although a mocking expression faintly shone in her eyes as she spoke.

Mrs. Rainsford turned, and took a step toward her as she asked —

"Have the others gone on?"

"No; they are waiting by the gate. They didn't dare to follow my naughty example, and come in here after you."

"Well, I am coming at once. Good-by for the present," she continued to Meta. "I will see you again in a day or two; and meantime, try to get a little color in your poor cheeks."

She gave Meta's hands another kindly clasp and hurried out of the room; but Meta caught

some words of grave reproof as the two passed through the porch, which set her wondering. She was herself very anxious not to meet any of Mrs. Rainsford's gay friends, not feeling sure that among them she might not find some of the former companions of her girlhood. But her own dread of recognition seemed almost to be shared by Mrs. Rainsford; and yet she could not comprehend why. She had felt even more strongly attracted to that imperious beauty than to Mrs. Rainsford's less striking mien; and a strange longing came into her heart to know more intimately and to be permitted to love that brilliant creature who had flashed so bewilderingly across her vision. By a curious chain of thought, Meta reverted, as she usually shrank from doing, to the old days when social pleasures were poured out before her with a prodigal hand, by the dear father who was so proud of his child. In the gay world she had often met queenly women such as this stranger, who were also garbed in all the rich array of high station. For the first time a faint doubt and regret crept into her hitherto loyal heart. How bitter and cruel had been all her married life! How quickly the promised love

and care of Robert Aberley had been snatched away! What had been hitherto but a deep grief took now the aspect of a wrong. What was she, poor foolish child that she was, to take upon herself the choice that had ended so disastrously? Then, in a strong revulsion of feeling, Meta wept bitterly in repentance at the treachery of thought, into which she had been for the moment betrayed.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATEFUL ENCOUNTER.

Alas, for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Tender the sun!

—Hood.

QUEENLY Mabel Vane was slowly sauntering under the deep shade of the mighty oaks, her haughty head drooping with an air of almost timid reverence, as she listened in admiration to her companion's burning words. He was a heavy-built, powerful man, handsome in a certain way with his strong, massive features, his large, deeply gleaming eyes, and his broad brow so full of intelligence. Yet over all was an air of rugged strength, that wanted the softening touch of refinement to make it truly eloquent of the man's supremacy among his fellow-men. That he was one who had made his way to the

foremost ranks by dint of fierce struggling was as evident as that he was not born to rule mankind. His step was heavy and plodding, as of one who had done many a day's hard work in earlier life ; and his strong, sturdy frame showed a superabundance of the muscle that comes of constant usage, while even his broad shoulders were slightly bowed, showing the earthward tendency of his youth's career. Even his large, but well-shaped hand, white as it was now, displayed the swollen veins and enlarged joints that result from manual labor. However, evident as it was that George Marchant was himself one of the people, whom he so powerfully subordinated to his strong will, yet this fact did not unfit him to be the great leader he undoubtedly was. Perhaps it was the real secret of his success, because it gave him that insight into their untrained natures, that all-pervading sympathy with their needs and desires, which controlled into almost implicit obedience the rude masses, that blindly followed their instinctive perception of his well-meant and powerful guidance.

The wonder was to see the proud form of Mabel Vane, sweeping along by the side of this

man of the people, and showing by her subdued air and deprecating manner, how utterly she was dominated by his ardent zeal for a cause in which it seemed impossible she should take a real interest. They had met for the first time, only the day before, both being guests at Belmont. Mrs. Rainsford, with all her sterling good sense and genuine attachment to her own order, was too kind-hearted, too sensitive to the claims of the suffering poor, not to have yielded so great an admiration to George Marchant's eager zeal in their service, as to have even listened, with growing conviction of his merit, to his wild, passionate outbursts of eloquence in their behalf. Accepting his acquaintance as that of one of the great leaders of the day, and fascinated strongly by the magnetism of his presence and his earnest belief in his own creed, she had invited him to be her guest while his duty kept him in her neighborhood.

Thus these two seemingly opposed natures had met under her roof; and after a brief moment of mutual distrust and repulsion, had suddenly assimilated in the most unprecedented fashion. Mabel Vane, who had reigned so long and so

indisputably over all hearts in her social realm, made no pretence of supremacy here, before this lowly-born, uncultured man of the people. His strong will and free soul, with its lofty aspirations, its single-hearted faith in his purposes, brought her narrower mind, her colder and more self absorbed nature, in utter subjection to his feet.

As they now walked slowly through the park, Marchant was saying —

“Mere passing successes or defeats matter very little in this grand struggle, whose ultimate triumph is so certain. They but momentarily encourage or depress the masses, who have often no other standard of principle, but that right must prevail in the end.”

“And we,” asked Mabel deprecatingly, “when you have so exalted your own order, when the trampled-upon masses have gained the ease and power you could give them, what will you do with us?”

An unwonted air of beseeching softened her dark eyes as she spoke; but Marchant, absorbed in his great theme, only vouchsafed one glance into those bewildering orbs, as he answered almost rudely —

"You identify yourself with the misused, unjustifiable power we propose to overthrow? Well, enjoy the distinction while it has any pretence to be one. In our day, which will be universal, and too strongly established to be ever ended, we will show you poor creatures of straw what real supremacy is. We will, at the best, receive you among our own ranks when you have learned to covet a place there. There shall be no aristocracy, no moneyed preëminence then."

"But if your creed be one of equality, why look down, even on us!" urged Mabel.

"We will not, when you show yourselves worthy" —

"We may be worthier now than you believe," she interposed warmly; "you look at us with distrust, you are eager to defy and overthrow as a mass those whom you will not learn to know."

Marchant paused, and bit his lip in mingled doubt and annoyance.

"Your objection is just, as far as it goes!" he said at last; "but it does not apply to me. I am capable of recognizing true merit wherever I find it. In the great day, when our principles shall have triumphed, and the world shall swing

smoothly again in its course, it will not matter whence come the true hearts whom we will place at the helm, to guide our noble vessel safely over the turbulent waters."

Mabel's cheek flushed warmly, and her magnificent eyes glowed with an ardent light, as some eager words rushed tumultuously to her lips. But even as they parted for utterance of her burning thoughts, Marchant checked them by a careless gesture, as he said in another tone —

"Who are these?"

He pointed as he spoke to a very charming group, seated on the bank of a tiny stream under the shade of a hawthorn in full bloom.

Meta Aberley's two days of utter rest and freedom from care had already greatly transformed her. A faint touch of color was beginning to creep into her pale cheeks, and a soft light shone in her eyes, as she watched the languid content of her child's movements as it lay in her lap. She had not seen the approach of the others, from whom her face was partly turned, nor had she heard Marchant's question; but she caught the last words of Mabel Vane's reply, and looked round in startled surprise, full of innocent wonder

as to their object. Mabel had said in tones of impatient irritation, as she glanced in Meta's direction with an air of ill-concealed contempt —

“Some new objects of Cousin Margaret's over-zealous charity. I fancy even she, however, has some suspicion of their doubtful claims on her kindness, for she is eager to keep them out of our sight. I have no patience with this indiscriminate patronage, that does not listen to the dictates of even the merest prudence.”

George Marchant glanced curiously at Mabel, as she spoke, his earnest, straightforward nature having no comprehension of this phase of hers. Then he said with unusual gentleness —

“Among the wretched poor, vice often means only the necessity imposed by the careless cruelty of those who live at ease.”

“Ah!” scornfully murmured his companion as they moved slowly forward; “you think, with Eugene Sue, that ‘Virtue often trips and falls on the sharp-edged rock of poverty.’”

A sudden color flamed into Marchant's dark face at this. He was accustomed enough to recognize evil and wrong, and to call them unsparingly by their names; but he had not learned the

veiled terms in which society can smilingly hint at what it would never declare plainly, or permit another's coarser speech to define. It hurt him unconsciously to hear those proud lips, whose own purity was so undoubted, breathe these covert sneers, that betokened such a want of womanly sweetness and trust. But the man of strong words and actions was helpless and embarrassed in this new dilemma. He who could rouse crowds of eager listeners into mad fury and vindictiveness, by his relation of wrong and suffering, was speechless before this woman's crafty suggestion, which left no salient point of accusation that he could take hold of. Abruptly and awkwardly he said at last —

“It is enough to know of suffering that claims our pity. Where the sin is we do not always see.”

Without awaiting her answer, he strode on till he stood close by Meta and the child. Their last words had been spoken in an undertone, so that Meta had no conception of the nature of the discussion her presence had provoked. As she looked with wistful longing into Mabel's half-averted face, which had already impressed her so

forcibly, she was a little startled when Marchant said, in low, vibrating tones of deep compassion —

“Is there aught of help or comfort we can give to you or the little one?”

“Help?” she murmured confusedly; “you are very good, but Mrs. Rainsford has promised me work, and given me a home.”

“Ah!” he said, smiling in relief at this. “You know her, then?”

“Not well!” rejoined Meta, puzzled at the interest of his tone, and wondering where she had heard its strong, ringing notes before, as she added, shyly, “Mr. Manning asked her to help me, and” —

“Manning — the preacher at Archdale?” he interrupted; “do you come from there?”

Meta hesitated, being anxious above all not to have her identity with Meta Newbold discovered.

“I was there with Mrs. Burton in the village for a few days,” she said, at last, “and she asked Mr. Manning to help me. I have lived in Pittsfield all my married life.”

“You are married, then?” answered Marchant, his brow clearing at this. “May I ask your name? Not from idle curiosity,” he added, as he saw her

sudden shrinking; "I am a man of some influence among my kind, and I might be of some use to you. I am George Marchant." He spoke with an unconscious dignity which strongly impressed her.

"My name is Aberley," she said shyly. "I owe you a kindness, too; for once in a moment of great need, a man gave me an alms in your name."

"How was that?" asked Marchant, in accents of profound astonishment.

Briefly Meta gave him an account of the assistance so strangely given her on that eventful night.

"Last Thursday, you say? In the woods of Archdale?" he muttered. "It is very strange!"

The suspicion of the stranger's having been his brother faintly crossed his mind with a suggestion of comfort. He could not be all evil, he thought, if he could turn from his path, in so great a peril, to help a poor girl like this. As he stood musing over this thought, Mabel, who had drawn a step back at first, in disdainful annoyance at this detention, now threw aside her momentary indignation, and coming nearer, said very gently to Meta —

"I saw you at Wilkin's cottage the other day, with Cousin Margaret."

"Yes," said Meta, looking up with a glad light in her soft eyes; "I could not forget you, having seen you once."

The graceful compliment of her words and tone, and her air of cultured ease pleased while it puzzled Mabel's keen perception.

"I shall be here for some weeks," she went on, with still kindly courtesy, "and you must let me have a share in Cousin Margaret's good work, and let me also profit by your skilled labors."

She said it in all kindness; yet her ready acceptance of their different positions in the world, her quick assumption of the power of patronage jarred faintly on both the hearts of her hearers.

"Thank you!" was Meta's brief answer, as she rose, and folding her child more closely in her arms, turned away with an air of proud humility. She had forgotten for an instant, in her strong impulse of attraction toward Mabel, her present lowly standing, and it hurt her keenly to be so reminded of it.

As she glided swiftly away from them, Marchant said gloomily—

"Why were you so eager to offer your patron-

age? Didn't you see that the girl was hurt by it?"

"Hurt? Nonsense!" returned Mabel, as they retraced their steps toward the house. "What kinder thing could I do than to give her the very help she asks for?"

CHAPTER VII.

A FANATIC'S PETITION.

Innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience.

— SHAKESPEARE.

ABSORBED with her houseful of guests, and willing to give Meta ample space for rest and to regain some of her former strength and buoyancy, Mrs. Rainsford had deferred longer than she at first intended, having another interview with the new inmate of Wilkins' cottage. The mistress of Belmont was essentially a busy woman; having her hands always full to overflowing of very varied occupations, while her active brain was ever planning new schemes of kind benevolence, of social triumph, or of somewhat whimsical breaking through the established customs, of which more timid souls stood in rever-

ential awe. She was sufficiently imperious in carrying out her caprices, not to permit word or look of questioning to influence her; and thus, her independence wrought many kindly deeds, while others would have still stood hesitating on the threshold. She was too much a woman of the world not to have comprehended the possibility of her brother's having but imperfectly learned Meta's history, and that it might contain details which she had sought to conceal. One glance, however, at that simple girlish face, which wore such a look of utter purity, satisfied Mrs. Rainsford that no deceit or guile were to be dreaded here. With unusual impulsiveness she accepted the sad story as true, and thought now only of giving the hapless girl the shelter and occupation she so earnestly craved.

Mabel's report of their chance meeting in the park, however, unconscious as she was of its being tinged with the jealous suspicion inspired by Marchant's pitying defence of Meta and his unwelcome reproof of her own assumption of patronage, gave Mrs. Rainsford a sense of uneasiness, that at once reminded her of the unwisdom of her delay in again seeing Meta. Receiving, also, the

impression that Marchant had had some previous knowledge of the girl, she sought to have him accompany her. She had the desire to interest him in her fate, even if on the way thither, she should find herself mistaken in this notion of his having known her before; but finding he had wandered off by himself, she was compelled to go alone.

Although out of sight of the house, Wilkins' cottage was only a few minutes' walk from it; and Mrs. Rainsford had scarcely collected her busy thoughts from other considerations to fix them somewhat deliberately on that of Meta's work, and Meta's due protection, when she found herself opening the little gate, with a sudden sense of uncomfortable surprise. Meta sat in the open window, of which the shutters were thrown widely back, to catch the soft evening breeze that followed so refreshingly the afternoon's sultry heat. Her eyes drooped shyly, as she absently played with her child, and listened with an air of deep attention to George Marchant's earnest words. He stood outside, seeming to have stopped for a moment in passing, and leaning on the low window sill, was evidently urging some course strongly on the girl.

As neither saw Mrs. Rainsford approaching, she unavoidably heard her guest's words, as his deep, resonant voice rang clearly in the still air.

"You are wrong!" he was saying, with almost passionate eagerness. "Suffering as you have done, fairly trampled upon by the cruel ones who might have helped you so easily, what cry of agonized reproach could ring more truly in support of the great cause than the pitiful story of your life? Only let me tell it! Only stand by my side that men may see the wreck wrought by"—

He started, and drew back, confused and abashed as it was rare indeed for him to feel, when Mrs. Rainsford's hand lightly touched his arm, and her voice spoke gravely—

"What is this story of which you know so much? It would have been more fitting, I think, that it should first have been revealed to my ears."

"Oh, madam!" cried Meta, flushing scarlet with pain and dread; "you know already—Mr. Manning has told you the little there is to tell. It is only that Mr. Marchant"—

"Well, go on!" said Mrs. Rainsford rather

sternly, as Meta paused in great embarrassment and cast a beseeching glance at Marchant.

Taking pity on her confusion, though he felt but a good-natured contempt for it and its cause, he came to the rescue in his easy, masterful fashion.

"I wanted to inspire her with a deeper sense of her injuries than she has the spirit to feel," he said, turning to Mrs. Rainsford as he spoke. "It is the old story of the weak ones going always to the wall, of the rude snatching by the strong of the very bread that the feeble need to preserve life itself. You may think I carry my zeal too far; but with that worn, wasted face by my side, to accentuate my own utterances, what heart could be unmoved by its pitiful aspect—what brain refuse credence to my indignant exposition of the wrongs that are so illustrated?"

"You are just mad, George Marchant!" murmured Mrs. Rainsford under her breath. "And what are these wrongs?" she asked aloud, watching curiously both their faces the while, and wondering what revelation he had to make.

"The every-day wrongs of the poor and helpless," he answered, his eyes flashing in sombre

excitement. "The very convicts in our prisons are better cared for than those whose poverty is worse treated than crime. They are fed and clothed with all needful comfort, and even their enforced labor is never severe or beyond their strength. It is but the loss of liberty. Further than that the worst criminal has no privation. Cared for in health or illness, guarded from pain and trials, even given decent burial after death, what a premium our institutions offer to vice! Be poor and honest, and you may starve as you will; raise your hand against the life or property of your fellow man, and the food and warmth denied to virtue, are bestowed ungrudgingly on the sinner."

"But for all that you would not advocate vice!" said Mrs. Rainsford, a little repelled by his wild words.

"No, a thousand times no!" he replied. "But I would give things their true titles. I would call the rich man the criminal, who sits at home in utter ease and luxury, drinking his costly wines and faring sumptuously every day, while his fellows are starving and perishing in the outer storm and darkness."

The startled look that came over Meta's face at these words did not escape Mrs. Rainsford's watchful eyes, and she inquired with apparent carelessness —

“But how does this apply to Mrs. Aberley?”

“Is she not one of the helpless victims of man's tyranny that I speak of? Has not the poor soul struggled for very food and clothing, not asking it as a charity, but only seeking to be permitted to work for them as a woman never should be allowed to do?”

“Nay!” said Meta with sudden courage at this. “A woman had best work, be it ever so hard, than to accept the support of another's labor. That is charity, too.”

“There should always be some one, a brother or a husband, who will do the work,” retorted Marchant almost roughly.

Meta leaned back in her chair, white to the very lips at this chance thrust which struck her with such savage force.

“I did not mean to hurt you!” said Marchant remorsefully, as he saw her wan look of suffering. “Your husband, poor fellow! did the best he could, no doubt.”

"Did you know him?" asked Mrs. Rainsford abruptly, puzzled more and more by this strange discussion.

"Who? Robert Aberley? No," replied Marchant, with a look of surprise. "They lived in Pittsfield, she tells me, and I've no acquaintance there."

"I fancied, from what you said, that you knew Mrs. Aberley before!" said Mrs. Rainsford, fixing her questioning eyes upon his face as she spoke.

"Only as I have sympathy and fellow-feeling for all oppressed, down-trodden human beings," he replied, with sudden ardor. "No; I never saw her face till the other day. I know only that she is one of the sorrowing members of our great family. I need not to know or to ask more than this."

With his usual abrupt independence of manner and movement, Marchant now turned unceremoniously away with a curt nod of his head toward Meta as he went, and plunged hastily into the growing twilight beneath the trees.

With a long sigh of relief and exhaustion, Meta leaned forward, making a motion to rise, which Mrs. Rainsford checked by a hasty gesture.

"Sit still," she said in kindly tones; "it is so late now that I will not come in. I meant to ask you about some embroidery that I want you to do; but I will see you again to-morrow. What a strange man Mr. Marchant is!"

"Yes; he almost frightened me with his violent speech!" said Meta timidly.

"He must be rather startling at first sight certainly. I fancied you had known him elsewhere, from seeing him here talking to you so familiarly."

"He is the sort of man to make his way where he pleases, and without ceremony," began Meta. Then flushing at thought of her implied denial of previous knowledge of him, she added, shyly, "I heard him once speaking to a crowd, and remembered his voice as soon as he spoke to me; but it was only for a few minutes that I stopped to listen then, and of course he never noticed me."

"Where was that?" asked Mrs. Rainsford absently.

"In Archdale woods," answered Meta, her voice trembling with apprehension as she tried to utter the familiar name firmly.

"Archdale! That reminds me that my brother is coming to make me a visit in a day or two. I

had a letter from him this morning, and he asks after you and the little one."

"He is very kind!" murmured Meta; "what would I ever have done without his help?"

"Had you no friends at all, then?"

"Only Mrs. Burton, who gave me a day's shelter when I came to Archdale. She had known my husband in old times."

"But at Pittsfield, where you lived. Surely there must be some kind hearts there."

Meta shook her head drearily.

"All those cruel days and months, we just suffered and kept silent," she said in low, hopeless tones. "No one knew of our poverty, or help might have been given. Ah, it was a bitter time! I cannot bear to remember it."

Mrs. Rainsford's hand rested a moment in kindly reassurance on Meta's shoulder.

"Do not dwell on it, then!" she said, as she took her leave. "Try to look only on the bright days which we will hope are before you now."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.

Better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men.

—LOWELL.

MRS. RAINSFORD'S guests had assembled on the broad piazza, as the sun went down 'mid a shower of golden rays; and as they watched the full moon rising in calm majesty over the eastern hills, their gay, careless speech and bright jesting insensibly yielded to the subduing influence of the scene, and languished into comparative stillness.

Mabel Vane had, with rare temerity, provoked George Marchant into a heated argument over the disputed rights of the working classes; and

had maintained the views of her own order on the subject with considerable daring and ability. His strong earnestness and vehement defense of the great cause which he had made the one object of his life soon, however, overpowered her less eager zeal. An enthusiasm like his must necessarily dominate all weaker natures; and while Mabel Vane, full of the glow and ardor of her passionate temperament, was willful and imperious to all others, to George Marchant's strong self-assertion she ever yielded sooner or later. They now sat somewhat apart from the rest, in lower toned converse, in which came many long pauses, when the thoughts of each were busy with other themes.

Mrs. Rainsford moved restlessly to and fro, now sitting down for a moment and playing with her two little girls and then starting up to pace the piazza's length once or twice. As she passed Mabel and her companion, she would stop long enough to ask some irrelevant question, and to bite her lip half angrily as she saw the covert impatience with which it was answered, and the eager return to their own more interesting thoughts, which they scarcely waited till her

back was again turned, to resume. The accord between these apparently inharmonious representatives of such widely opposed forces, evidently annoyed Mrs. Rainsford as much as it puzzled her. Turning from its contemplation with a cloud on her usually serene brow, she tried to smile as she made some careless remark to her husband, who was deep in an astronomical discussion with that fair and skilled adept in all mystic lore, Mirabelle Perkins. This wise member of one of Boston's most learned and select coteries was maintaining with gravest arguments and many-syllabled terms, a theory, which was too new and startling to be accepted, or even permitted to pass unquestioned, by Mr. Rainsford. With patient and methodical reasoning, he contrived at least to bring confusion in the enemy's camp, although his adversary, constantly shifting her ground, with true feminine inconsistency, bewildered his less versatile mode of thinking, till he was not quite sure, on the whole, whether he was defeated or not.

Nodding good-humoredly at his wife's troubled countenance, and secretly relieved to have the burden of his perplexing discussion thus lifted from his uneasy shoulders without having openly

run away from it, he remarked, not having any suspicion of the effect his careless words would have—

“Those two,” glancing shrewdly at Mabel and Marchant, “seem to be improving their acquaintance wonderfully. Marchant is a good fellow enough, and has brains as well as genius of a certain sort; but whether the Vanes would thank you for throwing Mabel and her fortune in his way”—

“Nonsense!” interposed his wife wrathfully; “it’s curious what match-makers men always are, while we poor women get the credit of it. Of course Mabel is amused and interested in studying this new specimen of mankind, who is so unlike any one she has ever known before; but she wouldn’t dream of a nearer regard, and to do him justice, neither would he. His whole nature is absorbed in his aims, to the exclusion of all others. Don’t you agree with me, Miss Perkins?” she added, looking appealingly at her guest, as if to gain strength for her own opinion, from her able endorsement.

“He’s very earnest,” replied Miss Perkins slowly; “still, you know,

“‘Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart.’

“It is easier for a woman to have a vocation that excludes love, than for a man. With her, there is not room for two strong passions. One or the other must succumb. But a man can live, as it were, two separate lives. His nature is often dual to a strange degree.”

“You appear to have studied the subject with wonderful acumen!” said Mr. Rainsford, assuming an air of admiring respect, while his eyes twinkled with a suppressed glee that rather alarmed his wife.

“One must necessarily study all phases of character to form a correct view of their complicated possibilities,” returned Miss Perkins.

“Well, as long as you think Mr. Marchant is not getting out of his depth, I’m content,” said Mrs. Rainsford, her brow clearing again as she felt more reassured.

“You’re not afraid for Mabel, then?” asked her husband.

“Mabel? Oh, no; a woman has only one heart.”

“And you think you know it is safe in worthier keeping? Well, that may be, but” —

"Don't forget that a woman of that ill-regulated temperament, if she has only one heart, has also many caprices and vagaries that are often stronger for the moment than an ordinary affection," observed Miss Perkins, in grave, didactic warning.

"Yes; if she took a caprice for Marchant"—said Mr. Rainsford, with a tormenting glance at his wife.

"Hush, you bird of ill-omen!" she exclaimed, frowning irritably at this.

"Do you mean me or Miss Perkins?" he persisted, with a low laugh.

"Ah! here is Arthur!" exclaimed Mrs. Rainsford in tones of glad relief, as she hastened to welcome him.

Arthur Manning, already well known to all the party except Marchant, greeted them with his wonted gentle courtesy; but as he held Mabel's hand for an instant, his eyes rested in surprised questioning on the companion with whom she had been sitting so conspicuously apart.

Often as he had heard of Marchant they had never before met; and as courtesy required the clergyman to extend his hand in response to his

sister's introduction, a faint, involuntary smile parted his lips as he clasped that strong, muscular hand in his own, so delicately white and slender. Remembering how earnestly they had contended for mastery over the flock to which he sought to be a faithful shepherd; how his labors for their souls' good had often been set at naught by this man's wild declamations against all rule and authority, he looked keenly now into the stern, rugged face, wondering if its owner's powerfully magnetic influence could not be swayed into safer channels.

There was an instant of profound silence as these two men stood there, with loosely clasped hands, and eagerly meeting glances. It seemed a moment that was fraught with pregnant meaning for good or ill to all mankind; and even the children drew back shyly and looked questioningly in the grave faces of the little circle. It was but an instant, it is true; scarcely to be noted except by those who ever read quickly the very drifting of straws on the swift waters of time. Then Mabel composedly asked Arthur Manning some trivial question, Mr. Rainsford whispered to his wife his dread lest the heavens

would fall, and as she tried not to laugh at his absurdity, conversation began to revive.

Marchant, less versed in society's restraints, less accustomed to conceal his deeper feelings beneath a surface of badinage and light discussion of unimportant themes, was rather silent for a brief space. He needed some impetus to urge the expression of his earnest thoughts, whether it were that of a sympathetic listener, or the applause of the surging crowds he could address so fluently. But presently, he aroused himself into sudden attention, as Mrs. Rainsford asked her brother for news of Archdale.

"There is nothing very new, as yet," he replied with an air of repressed anxiety; "but I'm afraid this ill-advised agitation among the factory-people will be productive of great disorder."

Like a war-horse that "scents the battle from afar," Mr. Marchant leaned forward, and his deep voice now broke harshly upon their ears —

"Why 'ill-advised,' Mr. Manning?" he asked curtly.

"Because it can only lead to evil results!" answered the other firmly.

"Can the improvement of the condition of the

poor be evil?" retorted Marchant sarcastically, while his eyes gleamed with sudden anger.

"That depends on what you call 'improvement.' These people have lived on the Newbold estate for years. They have never suffered any real privation — have never been wronged or defrauded in any way — why not let 'well enough' alone?"

"Because their condition can be bettered!" replied Marchant. "The pitiful wages that a by-gone generation accepted because it knew no better, ought to be doubled in these enlightened days."

"But who is to do the doubling?" asked Mr. Rainsford, a little contemptuously, for he did not share his wife's enthusiasm in their new ideas.

"Mr. Newbold, of course. He fills his pockets to overflowing with the unrighteous profits; let him share them with the hard-working laborers who have earned them."

"But he may not choose to," objected Mr. Rainsford.

"Then he must be compelled to!" exclaimed Marchant, his eyes all ablaze with excitement.

"As a matter of fact," said Arthur Manning,

with mild forbearance of tone, while a slight flush crept into his cheek, "Mr. Newbold tells me he would have to close the factories if the men seriously demand an increase of wages."

"And why?" asked Mabel earnestly.

"Because among so many, that which would seem to each but a trifling addition to what they have hitherto received, would aggregate into so large a sum as to more than swallow up the profits of the business."

He spoke to Mabel with an air of courteous consideration, but his own eyes flashed with quick spirit, as Marchant contemptuously uttered the one word —

"Rubbish!"

There was a moment's silence at this harsh and discourteous exclamation; and then Mrs. Rainsford said coldly —

"That is a strong word, Mr. Marchant, stronger than our ears are accustomed to. Do you think Mr. Newbold does not know, or that he misrepresents his own business results? Have you such access to his books, or such better knowledge of the profits of the factories, as to warrant your very decided views?"

Marchant was not in the least abashed by the calm severity of her tone and manner; in truth, it was scarcely noticeable to one, who, in the heat of debate among his uncultured associates, often received unmoved the most cutting retorts, the harshest of epithets. He merely replied —

“I know he could not live in all that ease and luxury at the Manor-House, if he was not taking more than one man’s share of the profits.”

“But has he not a right to more than one man’s share?” inquired Authur Manning with patient gentleness. “The property is his” —

“How did it become his?” interrupted Marchant roughly. “Did he buy it with his own earnings? Did he work one hour to acquire it?”

“It was his inheritance,” interposed Mr. Rainsford rather sternly.

“There should be no such inheritances!” said Marchant. “That whole property has been built up and made more valuable, year after year, by the men who are taught to cringe and say ‘thank you’ for permission to go on increasing Newbold’s wealth.”

“But what would you do then?” asked Mabel

deprecatingly, as she shrank in unwonted timidity from his fierce glance.

"Take it from his unjust control, and divide it among those who earned it."

"Share and share alike?" asked Mr. Rainsford, his eyes twinkling with a subdued merriment that boded no good to his obtuse antagonist.

"Yes! Why not? Have they not all equally borne the burden?"

"And poor Newbold—would you give him nothing?"

"Let him work for his own living, as many a better man has done. I have no pity for the idle aristocrats, who live on other's blood and brains."

"I'm not so sure about the brains," observed Mr. Rainsford; "and I'm glad, as I'm an idle aristocrat myself, that I have no immediate need to ask your pity or help. But let me ask you one question, Marchant, just to elucidate this problem clearly. Don't you think, now"—he paused an instant, and his voice suddenly took a tone of covert sarcasm which made all lean breathlessly forward to listen—"don't you think that if Newbold's property was all divided among the factory people, as you seem to think would be fair and

just, that, however exactly the division might be made, there would be an inequality at once in favor of the man who got up earliest the next morning?"

An instant's silence was broken by faint, decorously suppressed laughter from nearly all the group, as Marchant stood actually nonplussed by the unexpected question.

"There's no need to suppose such a foolish thing!" he muttered gruffly.

"Still it is sure to happen!" continued Mr. Rainsford. "You know yourself that the man who is most eager to get on in the world, or who has wife and children depending on him, will be at work again far sooner than one who is naturally idle. And so the man who earned the highest pay" —

"There shouldn't be any difference!" interposed Marchant sturdily. "Our system provides a fair price for every man's work, and does not permit any one's being driven to death to earn more."

"You'd pay all alike, then?"

"Each class of work should have the same wages" —

"What a premium you offer for laziness and inefficiency!" cried Mr. Rainsford. "It will be good for me, when my day of work comes; for really, I don't know of any way in which I could fairly earn a livelihood, if I were put to it."

His lips uttered a faint, contemptuous whistle, as he turned and re-entered the house as though wearied of the discussion.

Then Arthur Manning, who had left the argument in Mr. Rainsford's hands, from a half-unconscious unwillingness to measure swords with Marchant as long as he could avoid it, turned to his sister, saying —

"Tell me of that poor soul, Mrs. Aberley. Is she doing well and satisfactorily?"

"I find her work very acceptable," returned Mrs. Rainsford; "and I don't wonder at your interest in the woman. She is attractive! Don't you know who she was before her marriage?"

"No," he said, with sudden reserve. "I can see that she is above the station she occupies; but still I did not like to pry into her affairs. I have no more faithful and reliable member in my flock than Mrs. Burton; and her favorable opinion of Mrs. Aberley satisfied me."

"After all," said Mrs. Rainsford, as Mabel and Marchant moved slowly away, and she looked after them half angrily, "when one meets a poor, starving creature like that, it is better to give quiet, real help as you do, than to overturn the universe trying to find the waif's right place again."

"Yes, these reformers themselves do enough zealous work, and spend enough hard-earned thousands, to provide for every pauper in the State. But you are growing lukewarm in the cause!" he added quizzically.

"I don't know about the cause," she answered petulantly; "but I'm out of patience with its half-educated advocates. Why is it they can't be gentlemen?"

But her brother's only reply to this was a good-natured laugh.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY.

With silence only as their benediction
God's angels come,
Where in the shadow of a great affliction
The soul sits dumb.

— WHITTIER.

BEFORE Mrs. Rainsford had time to revert to her protégée at the cottage, a servant came tiptoeing in a very mysterious fashion from the interior of the house, and stood doubtfully in the doorway as if seeking to catch her mistress' eye.

"What is it, Ann?" asked Mrs. Rainsford rather impatiently, for she saw no reason why the girl should not have fulfilled her errand at once, without all this parade of deference.

"Only — please, ma'am — Wilkins would like to speak with you a moment, he says."

"Wilkins — at this hour? Nonsense, Ann!

Tell him to wait till to-morrow. It's about some vines I want moved," she continued, turning to her brother, "and I can't give him any directions till I see where they'd best go."

But the girl still waited, hesitating and confused, as if she was uncertain how to proceed. Then, as Mrs. Rainsford did not observe her continued presence, she burst out nervously —

"Please, ma'am, if you could just see him — it's something wrong with the baby, I believe."

This quickly aroused Mrs. Rainsford's interest.

"The baby!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you say so before? Send him here at once! The stupid creature!" she continued, as she rose impatiently and moved toward the steps. "Why couldn't she say that at first?"

Before her brother, who had followed her eagerly, could speak in reply, Wilkins came hastily round the corner of the house.

"It's the child, ma'am," he said breathlessly. "My wife thought I'd best come and tell you right off."

"But what is the matter?" Mrs. Rainsford asked.

"Well, it were took right bad this afternoon,

and we'd the doctor there in a jiffy; but he just shook his head, discouraging like, and said there was nought to be done for it."

"That poor girl!" cried Mrs. Rainsford and her brother, almost in a breath; and waving Wilkins aside, she added —

"I shall go at once; will you come, too?"

"Yes," he said gravely; "we may comfort the mother at least."

"You have no hope, then."

"No; I have dreaded this from the first. I've seen too many such cases not to know how hopeless they must be."

"But why?" asked his sister, as they walked rapidly down the drive. "The child was puny, but otherwise healthy, I thought."

"It inherited the curse of a broken constitution from its father, I fear, and its mother's poorly nourished frame only made the evil greater."

"It will go near to break her heart," muttered Mrs. Rainsford, as she paused an instant at the gate to regain her breath, and to nerve herself for the coming scene of trouble.

Entering at once Meta's sitting-room, which was lighted only by the flood of moonlight that

poured through the open window, they exchanged puzzled glances as they saw her slight form crouching in the arm-chair, silent and motionless as death itself.

"Can it be over?" murmured Mrs. Rainsford, hesitating which way to turn. At this moment, Mrs. Wilkins appeared in the doorway of the bedroom, and seeing her mistress, wiped her eyes, and pointed energetically to the poor girl who lay there so prostrated by her terrible grief.

While his sister exchanged one or two whispered words with Mrs. Wilkins, and learned how sudden indeed had been this unexpected blow to the hapless mother, Arthur Manning walked softly to Meta's side, letting his hand rest lightly on her bowed head as he said gently —

"God pity you, poor child!"

She started, and raising her head, looked in his face with a pathetic entreaty in her eyes that brought tears into his own.

"Oh!" she moaned drearily, "she was all I had in the world! God was cruel to take her from me."

"Listen!" he said, bending one knee on the cushion at her feet, and taking her feeble, trem-

bling fingers in his warm, friendly clasp. "How can you know that? There are so many sad things in this life. Are you not glad to know she is safe in the Paradise she belongs to?"

"But I loved her so! She was my own, my darling! How can I live without her?" she cried, in her restless anguish.

"You may not need to," he replied, glad to find she would listen to him, and seeking above all to divert her thoughts for a moment from her loss. "God only knows how short your own life may be. Is it not best to have your darling go first? Had the summons come for you instead of her, could you have borne it?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, shuddering, and feeling an instant's comfort in the thought. "It is such a cold, cruel world!" she went on plaintively, while soothing tears now fell rapidly from her burning eyes.

"It does try us sorely at times!" answered Arthur Manning, with a deep sigh.

"And you think I may not have to wait long?" she asked, with touching submission. Then wearily lifting one thin arm, and looking through her tears at her wasted fingers, she added slowly,

"Yes, it was hard enough to keep alive when I had her to care for; now, it must be easy to die."

Mrs. Rainsford, stepping lightly across the room, reached her brother's side in time to catch these last words.

"Hush, dear child!" she said tenderly, as she drew that weary, aching head upon her own kind breast, and softly smoothed back its disordered tresses. "God gives us always some one to love and care for. He never leaves us quite desolate."

Meta made a faint motion of dissent, but did not speak.

"Tell me, my child!" continued her warm-hearted comforter, "is there no one we can send for? No one who will"—

A startled cry broke from Meta's lips as the remembrance of her brother's words flashed upon her. Ah! how he would rejoice if he knew it! How he would triumph in the destruction of this last obstacle to her return!

"He will be glad!" she muttered passionately, as she wrung her hands in a new frenzy of despair, and moaned in still bitterer anguish.

"Who?" asked Mrs. Rainsford, bending nearer

to catch her feeble utterance, and not quite sure she had heard aright.

Meta caught her breath in sudden dread of self-betrayal. More than ever was she firm in her purpose that the home which was harshly closed against her dear ones should never again shelter herself. Seeing Mrs. Rainsford's look of inquiry, she forced herself to say more composedly —

“There is no one. I am alone now, utterly alone in the world. God help me! How can I ever go on living this desolate life?”

Arthur Manning had withdrawn a step when his sister came near; and now as he looked at her he made a gesture of inquiry toward the other room. Obeying her silent movement of the hand, he walked thither, and found Mrs. Wilkins stepping ponderously but without noise, about the room, giving the last touches of prim order, while on the neatly-arranged bed lay the tiny, silent form of Meta's child. He stood an instant by its side in silent prayer for the bereaved mother, and then withdrawing the cambric handkerchief that covered its face, looked long and sadly at the marble repose of its features.

As he did so an odd resemblance to some famil-

iar face flashed upon his fancy, and seemed to grow upon him each instant that he stood there. Who the child resembled he could not imagine; but more and more he saw the vague likeness which he could not fix. Giving up the quest at last, and trying to convince himself that the notion was purely imaginary, he stooped to pick up the handkerchief which had fallen from his hand in the first moment of surprise. As he was about to replace it a name in neat, simple embroidery caught his eye, and before he could stop to consider what he was doing, he had seen the word 'Meta'.

Then, with a flash of bewilderment, he understood the truth. This must then be Meta Newbold, his friend's sister, whose disappearance had excited so much wondering comment, and whose name Ralph Newbold never spoke, or would permit to be mentioned in his presence. Now, he comprehended the resemblance which had puzzled him. The tiny features were absurdly like Ralph's having that precocious distinctness that is often seen in the face of a very young child, and which becomes softened and modified later.

His sister's calling to him from the sitting-room

forced him to rejoin her, while still puzzled which way his duty lay. The sight of Meta's pale face, so full of patient suffering still, although she was more composed, decided him, however, to take no steps in the matter without her consent. He had no means of knowing whether Ralph would welcome the information he possessed; and at present, Meta was sufficiently sheltered and cared for.

"Let me take you up to the house," Mrs. Rainsford was saying as her brother came in.

"No, no!" answered Meta vehemently. "I can sleep here on the sofa, or at least rest, as much as need be, but I will not leave her."

They both saw this resolve was natural, and not to be combated. At the same time, to leave Meta alone could not be thought of.

"Go back, Arthur!" said Mrs. Rainsford, after a moment's reflection. "Just tell the people generally, if they ask, that I am called away by a matter of importance, and then explain it quietly to Henry."

"Shall I come back for you?" he asked.

"Well, yes; come as soon as they have all gone to bed, so I won't be bothered with questions. I can tell better then what I will do."

He left her, with a kind word and hand-clasp for Meta, and Mrs. Rainsford set herself to soothe and cheer the desolate creature, as best she could.

She did not try common-place words of consolation, or seek to check the flow of bitter tears, which brought such healing and strength to the worn spirit. She only sat patiently by her side, after persuading her to lie down on the sofa, and listened with tender sympathy to the broken words, the touching little memories those pale, quivering lips murmured at intervals, till the sleep of exhaustion crept softly over the bowed form.

Brief snatches of sleep they were at first, and Meta awoke from them with such a cruel shock of terror, as the sense of her loss again came upon her with renewed bitterness, that Mrs. Rainsford at last sent Mrs. Wilkins to the house for a composing draught, which she persuaded Meta to take.

When Arthur Manning returned, it was not far from midnight, and Meta could now, in her quiet slumber, be left to Mrs. Wilkin's care, who readily promised to watch over her till Mrs. Rainsford should return in the early morning.

As they walked back to the house, Arthur asked —

“Have you any idea of her wishes for the burial of the child?”

“Yes; she asked me if it might be placed in our own vault here for the present. She has some curious notion of moving it some day, but does not say where. I suppose it must be her fancy to have it near her, while she remains here, and then to place it by her husband.”

Arthur understood more clearly what Meta's ultimate intentions must be, and augured well from this indication that she meant some day to make herself known to her brother again. But he only said, gravely—

“You are very good to the poor soul. I will help you to carry out her wishes fully.”

CHAPTER X.

A ROUGH ENCOUNTER.

I am one

Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed, that I am reckless what
I do to spite the world.

—SHAKESPEARE.

MABEL VANE was so accustomed to the deference which all around her yielded to her imperious sway, that her free, fearless spirit never imagined the existence of ordinary dangers. In the sphere of her refined dominion, threats or opposition never came, and thus her splendid nerve had never been tried by dread of physical injury.

Mirabelle Perkins, too, in her own way, was singularly fearless. With her this was chiefly the result of her eager research into all the mysteries

and odd corners of existence. In the presence of flood or flame, that endangered life itself, she would have paused coolly to inquire what forces of nature had combined to produce this threatened disaster, or just how far man's outrage of nature's laws was responsible for it.

Thus the two girls, though very dissimilar in their impersonation of widely differing temperaments, could thoroughly enjoy long rambles together, through the woods and lonely farm roads near Fairfield, without having the least apprehension of danger of any sort. Their totally opposed views and practice of life, while too far apart for the least jarring, gave a keener zest to their discussions; and they went on their wanderings and returned, in always the best of humors with each other.

Sometimes George Marchant went with them; but on these occasions the walk was far less harmoniously enjoyed. The one idea of his mind ever came to the surface; and with his companions' respective faiths in the supremacy of intellect, or in that of social position, even Mabel's admiration of the man did not keep her silent. The triangular argument which would ensue was

too unequal to give satisfaction to any of them; and thus, Mabel did not encourage Marchant to accompany her on her walks, when Mirabelle Perkins was of the party.

The two girls had wandered further than usual one cool, overshadowed afternoon, too intent on their conversation to notice the growing gloom which betokened the approach of a storm. A low peal of distant thunder startled them at length into making the unpleasant discovery, not only that adverse weather was close at hand, but also of their having reached an unknown region, in which they were, in effect, lost.

As Mabel turned a little pale at this, Mirabelle said, with a composure she was far from feeling —

“Don’t be worried, Miss Vane; we know the direction in which we have come, and in returning will soon come upon some familiar point. Only we must hurry, on account of the storm.”

Silently Mabel assented, and with one consent, they clasped hands, and turning, broke into a little run down the slope they had just ascended. At its foot, however, as they paused to take breath, they looked at each other in eager questioning, as to which of the two paths before them,

that apparently took nearly the same course, was the right one.

"It can't make very much difference!" urged Mabel, as she noticed this. "They must both come out in the direction of Fairfield."

"That's just what you may be sure they don't," returned Mirabelle philosophically. "If they did, there wouldn't be two of them."

This very evident truth Mabel could not controvert; and there was no time to lose over the selection before them. As carefully as they could in their hurry, and in the increasing obscurity produced by the overclouded heavens, they looked for some token by which they could recognize the path which had led them hither.

A massive rock by the way-side, where they were sure they had before rested a moment, and admired its rich covering of many-colored mosses, at length decided their choice. With fresh courage now, they sped gaily on this path, laughing in joyous relief as they hurried on, and not wasting breath in words. But presently they paused, and looked in each other's faces with renewed alarm. They were approaching a dreary, swampy bit of ground which they certainly had not seen before.

As they stood, looking eagerly in every direction, and not quite daring yet to utter the thought which troubled both so keenly, a rough, surly, low-browed man, who had been sitting unobserved on the top rail of a broken fence near by, now came forward, with his hands in his pockets, and said, as he glanced suspiciously at them —

“Ye are looking for some one, maybe?”

“Only for the path,” returned Mabel, shrinking closer to her companion as she met that evil gaze.

“I think we’ve lost our way,” explained Mirabelle more courageously. “We want to get back to Fairfield before the storm.”

“Fairfield!” he exclaimed, with a coarse laugh, as he leered at them in a way that made both shiver with unaccountable dread. “And what might ye want at Fairfield, if I may be so bold as to inquire?”

“We’re staying there, at Mrs. Rainsford’s,” answered Mabel with pale, stiff lips, trying to conceal her growing terror.

“Ah! I’m in luck, then!” said the man, his eyes gleaming with such devilish glee, that the girls now stood cowed and silenced before him.

They but half recognized the fright which was so novel a sensation to them; but they felt with overwhelming force their helpless position; and even their desire to turn and fly from this desperate man was sternly forbidden by the remembrance of their being so utterly lost.

"May be ye know George Marchant?" the man went on, with a sneer. "He's staying there, too, I'm thinking."

"Marchant!" echoed Mabel, with a hysterical sob of relief. "Oh, yes; is he"—

"Yes; he's a friend of mine!" returned the man, with a disagreeable chuckle. "Now what'll ye give me to show ye the way back?"

"Oh, anything!" cried Mabel, taking out her purse and hurriedly opening it.

The man's eyes flashed as he caught the glitter of gold coins through its meshes, and with a silent nod, he plunged into the underbrush, looking over his shoulder to see that they were following.

They scrambled after him as best they could, not daring to hesitate as a heavier peal of thunder sounded in their ears. A few moments of this rough progress brought them to an open path;

while in the distance and not half a mile away, stood Fairfield in full view.

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed both the girls, as the man stopped again, and stood in the middle of the path so that they could not pass him. But a new dread chilled the expression of their gratitude upon their lips, as they saw his ominous attitude and crafty gaze.

Again Mabel began to open her purse; but he reached out his arm and took it out of her hand before she could comprehend his purpose.

"Ah!" he exclaimed gleefully, as he tossed it in the air and caught it again, seeming to delight in the joyous ring of the metal. "Now that's handsome of you!" he continued. "Hasn't that other one any gratitude for my help?"

Mirabelle silently produced her purse, and meekly handed it to him. It was too lonely a place, and they were too eager to escape from so coarse a presence to care what ransom they paid for deliverance. The contents of this second prize were principally bills; and the man coolly counted and rolled them up again, while the girls stood trembling before him.

"It takes these high-flyers to know what a ser-

vice is worth!" he observed at length. "Now, many a man would have thought twice before he'd have given up his purse so easily."

"A man could have defended his property!" exclaimed Mabel indignantly, for her cowed spirit was beginning to revive.

"Yes; and got knocked down for his pains," muttered the man savagely, as he glared angrily into her face. "Now, then, it's going to rain pretty smartly in a minute or two, and ye'll be wanting not to spoil your fine toggery. I'll just have a little remembrance of ye" —

"What do you mean?" gasped Mabel, thoroughly frightened by the new menace of his tone.

"Oh! just your watches and your rings," he answered, with a grin of delight, as they hurriedly dragged their watches from their belts and thrust them in his hand, while they fairly tore off their gloves to obey his further behest.

"Stop!" he said, with quite a patronizing air. "Never mind your rings! I hate to see ye tearing your gloves that way, and I've got enough to last me one while."

The girls looked at each other in bewildered surprise at this forbearance, and in that instant,

the man turned and disappeared in the heavy undergrowth, through which but a moment since they had made their way.

"Come," said Mabel excitedly, as Mirabelle looked thoughtfully after him. "He may come back — or some one else — ch! what are you waiting for?"

Mirabelle composedly drew Mabel's arm within her own, and as they walked hurriedly homeward she observed —

"It is odd how many phases there are of human nature! Now that may be a very common one, but I never met it face to face before; and" —

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Mabel, glancing in terror over her shoulder, as she urged her companion into a faster gait. "Don't stop to speculate over phases of character just now! You can meet ruffians like that every day if you want to. There's nothing wonderful or intricate about them!"

"I don't agree with you!" returned Mirabelle calmly. "I don't think the man was a common ruffian, either. He looked more like one who had been driven by want and misfortune into a career he would never have chosen."

"What high-strung nonsense you can utter!" exclaimed Mabel indignantly. "Are you going to defend this highway robber, and exalt him into a hero? What possesses you to take such a ridiculous view of him?"

"Principally because he did not take away our rings," said Mirabelle, quite unperturbed by her companion's vehemence. "The man showed that his early training had been fairly decent. Can't you respect the discrimination that made him spare what he knew might be gifts that could not be replaced?"

"He had no scruples about taking our watches and purses."

"True! But he could see at a glance that we could really do without them better than he could. I fancy that man is capable of bestowing charity, in turn, on some poorer and more wretched specimen of humanity than himself."

"He becomes the almoner of our bounty, then!" replied Mabel sarcastically. "Really, Miss Perkins, the world would call you a lunatic, could it hear that rhapsody."

"I don't doubt it in the least," replied her companion tranquilly. "The world always dubs

as insanity whatever is above or beyond its comprehension."

Here the discussion ceased, as the first heavy drops of rain forced them into a quick though short run into the house, now fortunately close at hand.

CHAPTER XI.

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER.

Famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thy eyes,
Contempt and beggary hang upon thy back,
The world is not thy friend, nor the world's law.

—SHAKESPEARE.

THE storm broke in all its fury as the girls ran panting up the steps of the piazza; but in spite of its rage and steady down-pour, Mr. Rainsford at once despatched a messenger to the police-station, as soon as he heard of the daring robbery that had been effected so skillfully. In vain the girls, nervous from the shock they had sustained and dreading further difficulty, implored their host to let it pass. He was an indolent, gentle-tempered man in every-day life,

but when once aroused, as now, to real anger, he could be very stern and unrelenting.

Their adventure was the one theme of absorbing interest during the evening. Even George Marchant, who did not often interest himself in such comparatively petty concerns, questioned them so closely as to the appearance of the man who had victimized them, that, in a sudden return of clearer memory, Mirabelle exclaimed —

“Have you any idea who he was? I remember now he said he knew you, and — forgive me for using his words — that you were a friend of his.”

Marchant laughed scornfully at this, but he secretly clenched his hand savagely under the table as he answered carelessly —

“Oh, those fellows always lay claim to me as a friend. They think because I would help the deserving to their rights, I ought to give them a helping hand, too.”

“Do you think the constables will catch him?” asked Mabel vindictively. “I am not as philosophical as Miss Perkins, who actually pities his misfortunes, she says.”

Marchant glanced at Mirabelle almost gratefully, as he answered —

"We never know how terribly a man is tempted before he yields to wrong-doing. But I do not defend him. The mean cowardice that would attack a woman has no excuse, even in man's utmost extremity."

"I hope they'll find him!" exclaimed Mrs. Rainsford, as she came near the group, in her restless wandering about the room. "Are you sure, girls, that you described him correctly? In your fright, you made him such a monster, that if he is, by chance, at all decent looking, he'll escape us yet."

At this instant, a servant brought in two notes, and laid them before Mr. Rainsford.

"Ah!" he cried exultingly, as he tore the first open. "Warner writes that Wilkes and Martin had the luck to light on that scoundrel, as he was prowling about the station, evidently watching for a chance to slip off on one of the trains. But what's this? Marchant, the rascal claims to know you—that's what you get for befriending the masses! He sends this elegant scrawl to you."

There was a murmur of intense surprise in the room, and one or two doubtful glances followed Marchant, as he rose and came forward into the

stronger light to receive the paper Mr. Rainsford held out to him. His face was perhaps paler, his lips more firmly closed than usual; but in that crucial moment he bore himself manfully; and he fairly disarmed by his composed bearing the faint touch of suspicion which hovered in Mr. Rainsford's eyes.

"I'm quite used to such applications!" he said, with admirable ease of tone and manner. "There is not one fellow in ten that gets in trouble without asking me to help him out of it. Well!" glancing contemptuously at the few lines before him, "as I have my meeting to-morrow, and will have no time to spare then, I must see this scamp to-night. I wonder — is it raining yet?"

He strode with firm, measured steps to the window, and seeing that the raindrops on the vines and branches without were glittering in the sunlight, he refused Mrs. Rainsford's offer of the carriage on the plea of needing a walk, and departed with his usual scant ceremony.

He knew mankind too well not to guess at the unsparing comments that would be made in his absence. He ground his teeth savagely, as he walked rapidly down the avenue, enraged at his

helplessness to prevent the half-formed suspicions he fancied he could feel in the very air. But he contented himself with the knowledge that as yet no actual facts had transpired. If the wretch he was going to see was indeed the miserable brother he had so vainly sought to cast off and disown forever, at least he had showed the discretion of not proclaiming that fact. The note indicated this caution clearly enough; and an instant's sensation of gratitude filled Marchant's heart for that relief. Then he plunged forward with a muttered curse on his lips. Never! never!—on this eve of a momentous victory, when on the morrow crowds of every rank would hang upon his wondrous eloquence, and he hoped to achieve such splendid results for the cause—never must this cruel disgrace become known! He pictured to himself some scornful opponent pointing his finger at him, in one of his most effective outbursts, and taunting him with his brother's life of crime.

Thus raging and desponding by turns, Marchant came to the town jail, and giving his name, asked to see the lately-caged captive.

“By the by, what's his name?” he asked care-

lessly, of the jailer. "He sent me this note, seeming to think he wants to see me, but" —

"He wouldn't give it!" replied the jailer. "When it was asked for, he said we could find out; but I don't quite see how it's to be done. Perhaps you will remember" —

"I don't expect to!" returned Marchant impatiently. "If I knew the names of all the rascals who imagine they've some claim upon my kindness, or if I undertook to remember them, I'd have enough to do."

"Will you have an officer go in with you?" asked the jailer as they proceeded along the stone corridor; "he's a pretty rough customer."

"No; it isn't worth while. Your men have had a wet scramble to catch him, and must want some rest now. I'm not afraid of the fellow."

"You don't need to be," said the jailer, looking admiringly at Marchant's stalwart form. Then, unlocking a cell door and throwing it open, he added, "You won't mind my locking you in? I must go back to my post."

Marchant nodded assent, and stood silent and motionless untill the footsteps of the retreating jailer could no longer be heard. Then lifting his

eyes, he sternly regarded the wretch who lay in a heap on the narrow cot. It was with no shock of surprise that he recognized his brother. He had told himself all along that it must be he; but the faint hope he had cherished of being mistaken died, nevertheless, with a cruel pang.

As he still neither spoke or moved, the fellow raised himself with a jerk, and said, somewhat defiantly —

“So you’ve come! You’ve been a precious long while about it!”

“I came the moment I got your note,” replied Marchant sternly. “You had no right to look for me at all.”

“No right? You who preach brotherhood so glibly, will you deny the right of your own” —

“Hush!” interrupted Marchant, taking a step nearer, and lowering his voice to almost a whisper. “You don’t know who may be within hearing; and I think you understand that it won’t do you any good to be known.”

“Not if you make that a condition of helping me!” retorted the other, in equally low tones.

“Helping you! How can I do that?”

“Oh, I’m keen enough to see that those pretty

lasses will hold their tongues if you ask them to!" said the man, with a fiendish grin.

"How could I ask it?" replied Marchant, with a patient gentleness very foreign to his nature.

"That's your business!" retorted the other roughly. "You'll contrive it some way, I'll be bound."

"But you were taken red-handed. No greater proof is needed to convict you than that. Their silence will not save you."

"That's your affair!" he repeated sullenly. "You'll manage them one way or another, and I'll hold my tongue."

Marchant paused, and bending down, looked keenly in the other's face. As he did so, his own softened and a slight tremor passed over his lips. And truly, if ever he felt pity for a poor, starved wretch, this man, who was born his brother, might well inspire it. His eyes gleamed out of mere caverns, so worn and wasted was his face, with the skin drawn tightly over its prominent bones. Once a man of powerful, massive frame, he now lay huddled up on the cot, seeming a mere skeleton, so frightfully was he emaciated.

"Where have you been?" murmured Marchant,

in tones so changed, that his brother dragged himself up again and peered curiously in his face, as he went on almost unconscious that he was speaking aloud. 'It's not many days since I saw you in Archdale woods—what has changed you like this?'

"I had ill-luck!" he replied sullenly. "You gave me help then, but it was not much, and"—

"I know! You gave some to a poor girl"—

"How did you learn that?" asked his brother suspiciously.

"She told me herself—not knowing you, of course—but I could guess. Well, go on!"

"I lost the rest by a cursed accident. It is heaven's truth, George, that I've not eaten one fair meal since. I've been starving and perishing day by day."

It was easy to see this was no exaggeration, and a stronger feeling of pity crept into Marchant's heart, till a new doubt arose.

"Tell me of Polly and the child!" he asked unsteadily.

"I don't know—I haven't seen them for days. They're not in want!" he added, shrinking nervously from Marchant's sudden look of anger.

"How do you know?" he asked curtly.

"She's with her own folks; they'll look after her for a bit, they said."

Marchant's tense look of pain relaxed.

"And you!" he said with contempt; "could you find no better way out of one trouble than to get into a scrape like this? Why could you not have been honest enough to earn a trifle for showing those ladies the way, or even have asked an alms of them? They would have helped you liberally."

"Well, it's too late now for that! If I'd got off with my booty, you'd never have heard of me again, I can tell you. It would have taken me far out of all danger this time."

Marchant once more regarded him with wistful kindness.

"Have you had anything to eat to-night?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, yes; they gave me a jolly supper the first thing, and offered me dry clothes, too; but I knew better than to take them."

"Why?"

"The old duds might tell tales, you know," winking solemnly at Marchant as he spoke.

There was another pause, and then the jailer's steps were heard echoing down the corridor again.

Marchant rose hastily, and bent down to say, hurriedly —

“I'll see you again after to-morrow. Don't answer any questions—you've a right to refuse, you know—and I'll see what can be done.”

The other nodded shrewdly and sank back on his cot as the jailer opened the door.

“Well, sir?” he observed, interrogatively, as Marchant passed out.

“It's a sad case!” he replied, shaking his head gravely as he walked slowly away.

CHAPTER XII.

"I SHOULD HAVE DIED IN DESPAIR."

No soul is desolate as long as there is a human being for whom it can feel trust and reverence.

—GEORGE ELIOT.

DURING the first few days after her child's death, Meta was so utterly crushed by the force of this cruel blow that it seemed impossible she should ever again raise her drooping head. But the very needs of existence compelled her to arouse herself. One gleam of comfort sent its little ray of cheering to her desolate heart, as she recalled the peace and repose which had crowned her darling's last days on earth. After all the struggles for actual food and shelter which had marked the first weeks of its sad existence, and perhaps had thus early sealed its fate for this life, the wondrous goodness that had provided

the home in which it had closed its eyes forever, made an impression on Meta's sorrowing heart that helped to soothe her grief, while it gave an impetus to renewed exertion. The first sense of utter desolation, of having nought on earth to care or work for, yielded now to the remembrance that in the dainty skill of her fingers alone lay her power to show gratitude for that inestimable benefit. Thus, when Arthur Manning called, the day after the child's burial, to say a temporary farewell, being recalled by his Sunday's duty to his parish, he was surprised to find Meta, sad indeed, but quite composed. Having seen her first bitter outburst of grief, he had dreaded encountering a fresh tumult of despair, knowing how his presence would remind her of their last meeting.

But Meta, sitting at her favorite window, and plying her needle with evident interest in her delicate work, made so unexpected and charming a picture, that Arthur Manning involuntarily paused at the gate, and gave one long, earnest look at the graceful outlines of face and form, before he made his presence known.

He entered unannounced, and walked quickly

to her side before she could rise to receive him, and he held her still fragile fingers warmly in his grasp, as he said with a pleased smile —

“I’m so glad to take such a comforting impression of you away with me.”

She looked up in surprise.

“Are you going away, then?” she asked, in tones of gentle regret.

“To-morrow is Sunday, you know, and Archdale expects to find me in the pulpit,” he replied cheerily.

“Archdale,” she murmured pensively, as if to herself. Then with some animation she added — “But some day you will come again, will you not?”

“In a week or two,” he replied. “Margaret has such a houseful now, I do not so much enjoy staying there as when she is alone. Most of them go away next week, I believe; and after that I will come back.”

“I am glad,” and Meta’s eyes filled with quiet tears. “But for you and her, where would I be now? Without you, my child might have died in the very woods, and I — oh, my God! — I should have died in despair by its side.”

"Hush!" he whispered, laying his hand tenderly on her bowed head, and profoundly effected by her outcry of grief. "God never deserts his own! Be sure He will always, with every trial, give strength to bear it."

"It is true!" she murmured, finding a sweet sense of consolation in his words and soothing tones. "In that awful extremity, He did give me the only comfort possible, in leading me to this peaceful shelter in time."

"I'm going by the next train!" said Arthur Manning, after a pause in which Meta took up her work with a sigh, and he had moved restlessly back and forth for a moment. "Have you any word for Archdale?" he added abruptly, looking keenly at her downcast face as he spoke.

She raised her eyes for a startled glance, while a faint flush crept into her pale cheek. Then, assuring herself that her alarm was needless, that he could only refer to Mrs. Burton, she answered with resumed composure —

"Tell Jane — Mrs. Burton, I mean — about the child; and say I am well, and" —

A sob choked her utterance, and he hastened to say —

"I will tell her—she will be glad to know of your comfort and well-doing. Now, I must say good-by; Margaret must be waiting for me."

An earnest pressure of her hand, a long look of gentlest sympathy, and he was gone. Meta, watched him as he hurried through the gate, and then resumed her work, with a sense of new comfort.

Under the shadow of her bereavement, she felt secure from the casual visits that Mrs. Rainsford's guests might otherwise have made, in their curiosity about her personally, and because her embroidery was so admirable, they might well be excused for wishing to watch its progress. Even Mrs. Rainsford, while flitting busily back and forth, and now and then sitting down for a few minutes to say a cheery word or two, never stayed long enough to be a drag on the poor girl's efforts at composure.

George Marchant, however, undeterred by considerations of mere delicacy, and full of a warm, overflowing sympathy for her grief, stopped for a few minutes nearly every morning, while taking the usual solitary ramble in which he gave himself up to concentrated thought. He never came

in; but standing outside, and leaning on the window sill, in his favorite attitude, he would almost silently watch her flying fingers, after receiving her brief greeting, would then utter a few disjointed sentences, and march away again uncereemoniously. Meta got quite used to his coming, and even felt a languid interest in watching his sturdy form, as it approached or left her, somewhat admiring the independence of his mien and gait.

The morning after the thunderstorm, however, she had not looked for him, knowing it was the day for the mass-meeting in the square of the town, and that Marchant was to be the principal speaker. It was therefore a surprise to her, not only to see him coming as usual, but to note an agitation of step and look that was very rare to her knowledge of him. His eyes, too, were heavy as though from loss of sleep; and there was such an air of disturbance about him, that she quite eagerly held out her hand through the open window, saying kindly —

“You are worried about something. Is it all right as to the meeting?”

“I hope so” he rejoined, with a keen sense

of pleasure at the interest she displayed, which somewhat soothed the dull aching at his heart. "I am nervous and out of sorts!" he added abruptly, as she still looked inquiringly at him.

"But why? You are not losing confidence in the cause to which you have given all your best efforts?" she asked, surprised.

"Not in the cause, but in myself," he rejoined gloomily. "Tell me," he went on, "are you with us in this matter? Have we at least your sympathy and good wishes?"

"To a certain extent, yes," she said hesitatingly. "I don't believe these violent agitations do any real good, you know. I think the problem will work itself out most satisfactorily, if you let it alone."

"But then you have no vital interest at stake now. Awhile back you would have been keen for your right to live and be provided for."

"I never claimed any 'right'," she replied quietly, "that conflicted with the rights of others. I only wanted mere food that I could earn, and" —

She stopped with a faint sob; while he, seeming scarcely to have heard her, went on eagerly —

"Tell me, are women always swayed by their affections so much more strongly than by any other considerations? If you were more closely interested on one side or the other—if you had a—brother, for instance"—

Meta's cry of dismay and dread checked his hesitating speech, and he looked into her pale face with simple bewilderment, while a dark flush stole over his own.

Instantly comprehending how accidental must have been his words, how far he must be from guessing her relationship to one who, indeed, strongly represented one side of the question, Meta recovered her calmness, and, with a sudden resolve to use any influence she possessed on the side of moderation, replied gravely—

"We ought not to let personal considerations sway us in matters of conscience; but we can never err on the side of mercy and forbearance."

This seemingly oracular utterance, for he was far indeed from guessing her meaning, impressed Marchant strongly.

"Mercy—forbearance," he said, half to himself. "Yes, you are right. A brother's blood must never cry against us unto heaven. You

believe that," fixing a piercing gaze on Meta's face, as he spoke more vehemently. "You believe we must be patient and forgiving to a brother" —

"What else would be the great brotherhood you are working for?" she answered, with shining eyes. "If not cemented with love and kindly deeds, will you try to bind its members together with violence and wrong?"

He looked keenly in her earnest face for a few moments, and then said, hoarsely, as though under the influence of some new and powerful emotion —

"How wise you are! How quickly you grasp the full meaning of it all! Oh, if you were but one of us!"

He stopped and turned away, walking some steps toward the gate, and Meta, believing he was gone in his usual abrupt fashion, absently went on sewing. But his voice sounded again in her ears, as he strode back and stood by her side.

"I have an odd fancy," he said somewhat incoherently. "You are so pure and true, so free from human passion and prejudice, bid me God

speed before I go—ask Him to bless my work and efforts.”

He bent before her with bowed head and reverently uncovered brow; and Meta, impelled by a strong sense of solemn responsibility, laid her fingers tremblingly on his forehead, as she said, softly—

“God bless and keep you in the right way, my brother,” and her eyes were filled with tears as she watched his rapid disappearance beneath the trees.

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CHAPTER XIII.

HE REMEMBERED HIS BROTHER.

O friends, be men, and let your hearts be strong
And let no warrior in the heat of fight
Do what may bring him shame in other's eyes.

—BRYANT.

AN immense crowd had gathered in the town square to hear the addresses, whose purport came so close to each heart in all that vast assembly. Marchant, perhaps because his eloquence was so wonderful and his zeal in the cause so unexampled, had been appointed by the committee to be the last speaker. It might have been thus planned that whatever errors of judgment or laxity of principle the others might be betrayed into, his matchless power would smooth over and correct. Usually all other speakers were tame indeed compared with him,

and he would chafe visibly under the infliction of listening to what seemed to him timid, lukewarm appeals. This time, however, coming direct from the softening influence of Meta's gentle words, it troubled him to listen to the almost incendiary language, which, lacking the gilding of his own persuasive eloquence, sounded crude and overstrained to his impatient ears. Perhaps these less experienced orators did go beyond the safe doctrine of the written laws. Certainly they were not listened to with the quiet respect that had prevailed at other meetings. Loud acclamations greeted their suggestions of armed resistance to oppression; and that of dividing more equally the wealth of the land among the needy brethren elicited tumultuous applause. But Mr. Marchant's quick ear caught an occasional murmur of disapproval, and detected a solitary voice here and there, ridiculing or holding up to contempt these stronger utterances. He was too accustomed to sway a crowd as though it were one man, to brook patiently even a breath of dissent or criticism. Thus he became gradually worked up into a state of suppressed rage; and when he took his place at last on the platform,

and the crowd suddenly became utterly silent and attentive, he looked into the sea of faces before him with an air of mingled scorn and defiance that was at least unwise.

He began moderately, however. He went over the ground again which the other speakers had, to his mind, not clearly explained; and with wonderful ability gave such an array of facts and figures in support of his assertions, that his voice was presently drowned in the thunder of applause that followed. Pleased with this, and in good humor again with himself and his eager listeners, Marchant's brow cleared, and his eyes kindled with new fire as he went on passionately —

“Oh, my brothers, in the bygone days when no one would have dreamed you had any rights, nor did any hope exist of your ever being less wretched, less down-trodden than you were then, it was not always in contented ignorance that you submitted to the force you dared not resist. There were always some thinkers among you, who saw the injustice of it all, yet feared to arouse you into a resistance that seemed worse than folly. In those days, could any one have foretold this enlightened era in which you are

free to fight for and secure your rights, and your masters no longer dare to refuse them, how eagerly you would have unfurled the standard of brotherhood and rushed to the affray, pledging yourselves never to rest till you stood on equal terms with your so-called masters. And now, how is it with you? The battle is already half won when you can with impunity hold meetings like these, and can show to an admiring world how strong and true you are. But what then? Is this to be a mere holiday spectacle? Are you satisfied to have spoken your minds, and to have accepted our championship, just as a pleasant summer day's diversion? Will you not join together, heart and soul, to secure the fruits of all this dawning freedom? The harvest is ripe now—our labors have perfected it—and it is in readiness for the sickle. Where are the reapers, whose sturdy arms will gather it in? Where are the faithful hearts that will beat only in unison with each other, that will even die in defence of their rights?"

One vast shout seemed to rend the heavens at this, and as it died away Marchant would have proceeded, when a voice from the crowd cried out —

"What is it you would have us do? Speak out, man!"

An angry flush showed itself in Marchant's face, and his eyes flashed ominously, as he exclaimed —

"There is nothing for any one man to do by himself. The whole spirit of our association is in concerted action."

"But who's to say" — began the objector.

"Shut up!" cried another menacingly, while Marchant, trying to ignore this second interruption, went on —

"Those who have given themselves to careful study in this matter are best able to advise us how to proceed; we do not advocate violence nor the destruction of property, but believe we can secure our aims and needs in more peaceful ways. It was all very well for the capitalists to go on increasing their gains, and multiplying their thousands, by grinding out the services of the poor on half wages, as long as they could. They have had their day; and have probably enjoyed it. Now we will have ours. We will make a fair schedule of the rates at which each class of work ought to be paid. We will try to be just to both

sides, not denying to the employer a fair profit on his capital, but we will take care that the workman, in his turn, shall have a chance to earn something more than mere bread. We will enable him to save every year from his earnings something to lay by for a rainy day, besides making his family comfortable in the meantime."

"But we won't have any more rainy days, will we?" asked a good-humored looking fellow just in front of him.

"Perhaps not so many," returned Marchant, smiling kindly at the questioner; "but trouble or sickness may come, you know.

"Why shouldn't our wages be paid then just the same?" asked another. "The master gets his profits when he's sick, don't he?"

"To be sure!" cried a third. "Why, the very slaves at the South were not turned adrift when they were sick. In fact, they were better off then, for they didn't have to work, and were taken care of just the same."

Marchant shook his head, rather annoyed at this interruption.

"We can hardly ask that!" he said patiently. "But if you have so much higher wages when

you do work, it will amount to about the same thing."

"And how are ye going to make the masters give us the extra wages? They'll be saying, no, I'm thinking; or they'll pick out the best workmen and screw extra work out of them."

Marchant waved his hand to silence this new objector.

"Our rules will be as equitable and universal as we can make them," he said firmly. "We will not allow members of our order to work for any employer who undertakes to make selections, or to give any preferences. He must take the men as they come, and treat all alike."

"But s'pose he won't!"

"Then none of our people will work for him."

A long, sharp whistle broke from the man, which was followed by a hearty laugh, as he exclaimed whimsically—

"Lord help the poor masters, then! They'll be bigger slaves than the darkies down South were, who couldn't choose their masters."

"Enough of this!" cried Marchant sternly. "We have not met here to listen to all these carping questions, or to be amused with buffoon-

ery. For the first time in all the long ages of the world, men have reached the consideration of how to provide equitably for the working-classes. The thousands of men who have joined together in this great cause, have done wonders already in compelling the capitalists to treat with them on a fair basis. But all depends on your action now. Be firm and resolute, yielding neither in terms nor in liberty of action, and the glorious victory you will gain, will bring peace and comfort to yourselves and your children for many a generation. But if you falter, if you seek for present advantage, and so weakly concede future benefits, never again can you hope to stand independently before your employers as you do to-day. They are wise enough to profit by any such folly on your part; and they will but rivet your chains more firmly, if now when they are loosened, you fail to cast them off."

"Master," said a new voice very timidly, "will you answer me one thing?"

Marchant turned, and saw a simple enough looking man, so undersized that he was nearly lost among those who over-topped him. He wore an air of subdued, uncomplaining misery, which

aroused in Marchant's heart a feeling of unwonted pity, and he answered with an encouraging smile —

“Speak! I will tell you what I can.”

“It's this,” he went on plaintively; “I'm but a poor cripple, as you may see, but I strive to do a fair day's work. I've a wife and five children to look after, and one's not right in his mind, poor creature! It's all I can do now to keep body and soul together, and it would be fine to get more wages as you say, but I'm sore afraid to try your plan. What if I lose my place and can't get another? I can't see the young ones starve, ye know.”

Marchant paused irresolutely for an instant. It seemed hard to urge that puny cripple who was so heavily overburdened now, to be foremost in the fight; and yet for principle's sake, he must not forbear.

“When you join our ranks, my brother,” he replied at last, “you will find we do not let even the least among us suffer for aught. There will perhaps, be a sharp contest at first, with the capitalists, who will not give in to our demands without a struggle; but we are provided with funds

and contributions, with which we can care for those of the brethren who are out of work."

A shout of applause greeted this popular statement, which was very generally accepted in a far wider sense than was intended. It was almost like offering a premium for idleness; and Marchant, while quick to see this effect, could not without serious blundering, attempt to modify it.

A sense of discouragement crept over him. It was easy to carry a crowd along on a stream of enthusiastic eloquence, while burning words of zeal fell from his lips only to echo in appreciative hearts; but a tiresome discussion like this, in which he must interrupt his ardent portrayal of his views, to answer the objections and criticisms of stupid louts, or half-educated laborers, tried him sorely, and entirely exhausted his small stock of patience. Suddenly to his recollection came those few words with Meta that morning, the state of exaltation into which his musings had led him, and her gentle low-voiced blessing, the touch of her light fingers on his brow. He had felt ready then for a grander success than ever before; had believed he would speak under a new and higher inspiration, taking all men's hearts captive.

Without quite seeing why, he felt he had partially failed, that for once some secret cause had defeated him. He left abruptly and in deep gloom, leaving it to others to close the meeting; and as he walked away, his passing the jail suddenly reminded him of his brother, and his heart sank cruelly. How bitterly had his intended day of triumph ended!

CHAPTER XIV.

FATE'S PERVERSE WAYS.

He who is false to present duty breaks a thread in the loom,
and will find the flaw when he may have forgotten its cause.

—HENRY WARD BEECHER.

MARCHANT had been appointed, with two others of the leaders among the brotherhood, to confer with Ralph Newbold for the arrangement of a new schedule of wages for his workmen. He had accepted the appointment gladly, because with all his eager zeal in the cause, he was too deep a thinker not to see the imperative need of moderate counsels and demands. The others were fiery new beginners, who were impatient to distinguish themselves even if it involved the riot and wrong which the wiser Marchant was opposed to, and he knew

how carefully a man of Ralph Newbold's fearless independence must be approached, to avoid the disastrous result of actual conflict. This committee was to take the afternoon train for Archdale, so that Marchant would be free to fulfill an engagement to address another meeting in Pittsfield the next day. As he, with one covert glance at the jail, which held so great a source of disquiet for him, now walked hurriedly toward Belmont, his busy thoughts conflicted sadly with his diverse duties. That anything could be done for his brother, seemed truly doubtful. The mere chance of inducing his victims to forbear giving evidence against him was so nearly hopeless, that Marchant dreaded incurring the risk of betraying his own secret, while seeking so uncertain a mode of escape. He was still puzzling his brains over this problem as he proceeded up the avenue, and was as far as ever from a satisfactory solution of it, when as he came in sight of the house, the carriage at the door, and the two girls standing on the steps of the piazza in travelling costume, made his heart leap with sudden joy and hope. Were they for some reason about to take the very step he would have

asked of them on his knees, if it could have availed anything so to humble himself?

The moment they perceived him, Mabel came hastily to meet him, with her usual lofty disregard of appearances. Putting both her slender hands in his, she exclaimed, with an ardent glow of interest flushing her cheeks and gleaming in her eyes —

Ah, how I have wished I could have heard you! It was magnificent, I know! Tell me how it all went off."

"Much as usual!" he replied rather curtly; yet his gloom was a little alleviated by the gentle sympathy of her looks and tones. "But where" — he began.

"Oh, we are off! We are going to take an incontinent flight from our woes and burdens," she interrupted gaily, yet having an uncomfortable sense of being rebuffed by his short answer. "We've been having a royal fight, in fact, and curiously enough triumph in running away."

He only looked the breathless question he feared to formulate in words, and she went on, as they ascended the steps together —

"Miss Perkins and I, though with different

motives, have vowed we will not give evidence against that unfortunate fellow. We have decided that we will insist our purses and watches were free gifts, if we are called to the witness stand; and so, in some sense they were. Our motives for yielding them to him are our own property surely. Of course Mr. Rainsford is furious, and Cousin Margaret is most as bad, though she inclines a trifle to the side of mercy. And so, to cut the Gordian knot with one blow, we are going home a day sooner than we intended. With me in New York, and Miss Perkins in Boston, they can't do anything to the poor fellow, can they?"


Marchant only replied by a glance, so eloquent of relieved gratitude, that Mabel added in a low, tremulous voice, while the flush deepened on her cheek —

"I knew you would be glad — that the man was one you knew, and were sorry for."

Marchant started, and looked keenly in her face, full of a sudden dread that she knew more than she admitted. Only a flash of ardent enthusiasm, blended with a glow of deeper feeling than she meant to betray, answered the eager inquiry of his gaze; and as he drew a long breath of

relief in feeling his secret was still safe, another conviction sent his blood in tumultuous waves to his heart, and filled him with a new perplexity.

Hitherto this impulsive girl's intense interest in his schemes and ambitions had seemed to this untutored man of the people as wholly inspired by her earnest adoption of his convictions. He did not attach due importance to the seeming trifles of tone and demeanor, that to those of her own class betokened the strong personal regard he had inspired in this willful, haughty girl. Now, as this truth flashed suddenly on his bewildered comprehension, his heart stood still one single instant, before the overwhelming force of the temptation which assailed him. He, who had consecrated every thought and effort of his life to the sacred cause, which claimed all his faith and service, paused tremblingly before this new demand for sacrifice. The personal influence of so ardent a disciple as Mabel Vane, and that of her high social position, added to the great wealth of which she had absolute control, were all items of gain for the benefit of the brotherhood that might well have dazzled even a stronger, more self-contained man. This crucial trial of his best and purest



principles came with the speed of the lightning's flash ; and — alas for his influence as a leader of thousands — it was no steadiness of principle that strengthened him to withstand the mighty temptation. No ! For one instant he faltered and glanced uncertainly at Mabel's speaking countenance. His fingers trembled as he made a faint movement of his hand to clasp hers in a pledge not to be broken ; but even then, Meta's sad eyes came appealingly to his mind, her sorrowful features seemed to plead with him to keep still the faith he had believed she was ready to crown with her gentle love.

Marchant, by an almost imperceptible movement, drew nearer Miss Perkins, who, in utter ignorance of the drama that was being subtly enacted before her, only wondered a little at his pale, stern aspect, and Mabel's look of suppressed pain, as she volubly exclaimed —

“Don't count me as a convert to Miss Vane's sudden freak of soft-heartedness, Mr. Marchant ! I haven't the least pity for the man, as an object of merely charitable consideration. It is only because I've looked into your laws, and see how inadequate they are, how unevenly they adminis-

ter what you call justice, that I've decided not to help enforce them."

Before Marchant could collect his thoughts sufficiently to answer this, Mr. Rainsford broke in rather gruffly —

"It may be all one to you what are the consequences of this absurd freak, Miss Perkins, but if this man, set free by your connivance to prey anew on society, commits now some greater crime, do you think you will not be responsible for it?"

"I dare say you'll find some other ridiculous law to hold me accountable," she replied coolly; "but the higher law of my own conscience will absolve me. Why don't you suppose, while you're about it, that it may be the turning point in the poor wretch's life, and his better feelings" —

"Don't imagine the rascal has any!" interposed Mr. Rainsford angrily. "I'm too out of patience with this folly to talk about it any longer."

He turned away impatiently, almost forgetting the courtesy due his departing guests. Mabel now came to the rescue, and with sudden hurry of movement, hastened her own and Mirabelle's

adieux, on the plea of having scarce ten minutes to catch their train. Thus, while aching with her secret consciousness of Marchant's having comprehended and tacitly rejected the golden possibility she had mutely laid before him, she contrived to control her features into marble-like composure, though the dilating nostril and compressed lips indicated faintly the storm that raged within. Neither Marchant nor herself, in the painful embarrassment which the moment held for them both, cared then to exchange look or word; and even that mere shadow of their usually fervent hand-clasp was a form both would have dispensed with, could it have been done without attracting notice.

"And you, too, Mr. Marchant!" said Mrs. Rainsford, as the carriage drove off, breaking upon his deep reverie with her courteous smile and words to his intense relief. "You must be in Archdale this evening, you say?"

"Yes; I'm on the committee," he replied, rousing himself up with a weary sigh. "I've one or two little matters in town to attend to before I go, so I will walk over now."

"But your train does not go for an hour, and

the carriage can take you," remonstrated Mrs. Rainsford.

"Thank you!" he replied gravely; "but I'd rather walk. I can think best that way. I'm too out of place in a carriage to do any serviceable thinking in one."

Smiling indulgently at this whimsical statement, Mrs. Rainsford shook hands pleasantly with her guest, promising to send his valise over to the station in time, and Mr. Rainsford even walked with him a little way down the drive, before parting with him.

Marchant was glad to see his good-natured host turn back, however; for he had promised himself at least one look and a few comforting words from Meta.

He found her pale and distraught from a severe headache, and could only blunder over some words of regret and sympathy as he held her hand with a lingering pressure and gazed longingly in her sad face.

"And the meeting?" she asked languidly. "Was all well?"

"As usual," he replied, with suddenly compressed lips. "There are always fanatics, you

know, who go to extremes on both sides of great questions."

"And now you are off for Archdale," she said dreamily, raising her heavy eyelids for an instant to look anxiously at him. "What takes you there? Another meeting?"

"No; I'm on a committee to bring Newbold to terms," he answered briefly.

He was startled at the sudden flush which was followed by a ghastly pallor, as her quivering lips essayed in vain to speak.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply, glancing with keen suspicion at her agitated face. "Do you know him?" he added, almost fiercely.

"Who—Mr. Newbold?" she asked faintly. "I—I've seen him—don't mind me!" she went on feverishly. "I'm not well, you know—it's nothing! Only tell me"—

"No," he said roughly, as he turned away; "I've no business to tell these matters to anyone, least of all to"—

He checked himself angrily, and without even a gesture of farewell, strode passionately and with long strides down the avenue.

He muttered mingled curses and regrets to

himself as he sped onward into the town. How the aspect of all his surroundings had changed! He had been so full of joyous ambition, so confident of glorious success but a brief space back—and now, what dark clouds were rising on his horizon, threatening to engulf him in some dread disaster!

One more trial awaited him. At the jail an unusual crowd was hanging about the doors, which made way for him with a respect that was born of his fame as an orator, but which he fancied betokened the knowledge he had sought so carefully to conceal.

Alarmed and irritated, he hastened to the jailer, but needed not to open his lips to make known his errand.

"Ah! you're too late; the bird has flown!" cried that worthy functionary, with a grin that still more disconcerted Marchant.

"What do you mean? Has he escaped?" he asked breathlessly.

"No; but word came that there'd be no witnesses against him, and the Squire just let him off with a reprimand."

A strange dizziness overpowered Marchant for

an instant. His temples throbbed violently, and such a sensation of faintness came over him that he leaned against the door-way in a desperate effort to recover himself. Then he managed to say, carelessly —

“Ah, well! So much trouble saved, I suppose.”

The warning sound of a whistle hurried him to the station, just in time to see the train speeding away that was to have carried him to Archdale. He ground his teeth in rage and disappointment, and fretted bitterly as he waited for the next train.

“I will be too late! The fates are against me!” he thought drearily.

CHAPTER XV.

"YOUR PEOPLE ARE WITH US TO A MAN."

O mischief! thou art swift
To enter in the thoughts of desperate men!
— SHAKESPEARE.

MARCHANT'S intended colleagues were not at heart at all sorry that he should have failed to join them at the station, although they expressed some decorous wonder and regret at his absence. They believed he was growing timid and vacillating in the cause they themselves had adopted with such ardor; and as they speeded on their way, they spoke vauntingly of the daring achievements they proposed to accomplish.

Calling at once on Ralph Newbold, and stating their errand to him with glib self-confidence, they looked askant at each other, and then stared

boldly at him in their surprise at the exceeding quietness of his mien, and the utter silence in which he received their demands. A trifle uneasy at this, the elder committee-man, James Higginson, resumed the thread of his discourse after a brief pause, saying with greater suavity of tone —

“It’s a very great pleasure, I’m sure, Mr. Newbold, to confer on these important topics with so fair and reasonable a man as yourself. We feel confident from your very kind reception of us, and the patience with which you have listened to our wishes, that you will readily see how eminently just this proposed arrangement is; and” —

“In fact,” interrupted the other, Henry Berkeley by name, who was tempted to bluster a little, since Ralph Newbold seemed so thoroughly cowed already, “our mission is, we may say, not one to be opposed, since we have the strength and sinew of the community with us. If might made right in the olden time, much more do might and right as we combine them, make sure of securing success.”

He stopped and looked round for the applause which he felt his words deserved; but Higginson frowned and shook his head slightly in disap-

proval of this covert threat, while Ralph Newbold still thoughtfully played with a paper-cutter, and seemed to have nothing to say.

As an awkward pause ensued, however, Higginson resumed cautiously —

“Shall we understand, then” —

Ralph checked his words with an imperious gesture.

“Have you said your say?” he asked sternly, looking with keen inquiry in both their faces.

They bowed silently, and he went on —

“Well, then, I will give you your answer — stay! — is it distinctly claimed that you represent my men? Are you authorized spokesmen for them?”

“Entirely so!” replied Higginson, while Berkeley chimed in unguardedly —

“Yes, sir; we called a meeting two days ago for this especial purpose, and your people are with us to a man.”

A heavy frown rested on Ralph Newbold’s brow, and his eyes flashed as he rose and faced the committee boldly.

“You shall have your answer at my agent’s office to-morrow morning!” he pronounced, with a

haughty gesture of dismissal, and turning away with a half-bow as he spoke.

"But, sir!" urged Higginson.

"That is all I have to say at present," said Ralph coldly.

"And the hour?" persisted Berkeley.

"That of beginning work, seven o'clock!" said Ralph, with such an ominous sharpness of tone that the committee hastened to bow themselves out.

"Could Marchant have done better?" asked Berkeley, rubbing his hands together in great self-gratulation, as they passed out of the grounds.

"I'm not sure!" returned Higginson doubtfully. "I don't like these men that act instead of talking. You can't tell how to take them."

There was nothing to do, however, but to wait till next morning, though both felt inclined to grumble at the early hour of their appointment; and it was in truth, fully half-past seven when they came in sight of the factories, which were nearly half a mile above the village. The mass of buildings covered a wide extent of ground, forming a hollow square, which was surrounded on all sides by a high, close paling. In front, on

one side of the stone archway which formed the only entrance, stood the agent's office. It was a mere room, with one door and two windows on the side toward the main road. Usually, within five minutes after the opening of the great gates, there was not a soul to be seen outside the paling, except when the agent stood in the doorway of his office smoking, or observing through the archway the busy throng within.

But to-day, late as it was when the committeemen appeared on the scene, the gates were still closed, the shutters on the office windows had not been taken down, and an agitated crowd moved restlessly to and fro before the archway.

Exchanging looks of consternation, Higginson and his companion pressed forward through the crowd, which made way for them, with mingled gibes and groans.

"You've done for us now!" muttered one rough fellow, shaking his clenched fist in Berkeley's face.

"What's happened?" said Higginson, trying to look at ease.

The fellow only pointed with a growl of rage to a notice posted on the closed gates. It was

simply to the effect that all work in the factories would be suspended till further notice.

"That's what he meant, then!" whispered Berkeley to his companion, feeling thoroughly disconcerted at having the tables so turned upon them.

At that moment the office door opened, and Ralph Newbold came forth, accompanied by his agent, who stopped to carefully lock the door behind him.

"Ah, good-morning!" exclaimed Ralph, with a great show of courtesy in the profound bow with which he greeted them. "You see I concluded 'discretion was the better part of valor' and have stopped the works."

"But not finally, I trust," began Higginson smoothly, taking courage from Ralph's easy manner. "You'll consider what we said, and" —

"When I change my views, I'll let you know. Come, Stanton!" and turning sharply to the left, they struck into a foot-path leading to the manor-house, and were beyond reach before the committee could collect its scattered wits.

"And what's to become of us and our families?" growled a very discontented-looking man,

as he walked up and down with his hands in his pockets, and wrathfully kicked the pebbles in the road out of his way.

"Oh, he'll come to terms in a day or two!" said Higginson genially. "He can't afford to have the works lie idle. He'll make up his mind that 'half a loaf is better than none', and give in before the week's out."

"Not he!" muttered another gruffly. "You don't know the sort he is. Why, he'd burn them factories up with his own hands sooner than have them worked any fashion but his own."

"That would be a great shame!" exclaimed Berkeley hotly. "It's your work, your half-paid labor, that's built and kept them up all these years. They belong to you more than they do to him."

"That's so!" exclaimed several voices angrily. "If they're to be burned, we'll have the burning of them ourselves, hanged if we don't."

"It's about all we'll get out of 'em," said another. "The master'll never take us on again. We've been fools, I reckon"—

"Fools to work so long on such wretched wages!" interposed Berkeley.

"They was better than none!" said the man.

"No; even two or three weeks' idleness will be more than paid for, when the factories are open again on our own terms."

"And meantime, we may starve" —

"Not at all! We'll see you have your share of what we have contributed for this purpose; and" —

"Be ye goin' to pay us for bein' idle?" asked a heavy, loutish fellow, who was evidently much given to frequent potations of strong drink.

"Certainly; so long as it is for the sake of the cause."

"Well, that beats me! Come, boys, let's have a drink over it!"

Half the crowd obeyed this suggestion, and trooped off in riotous disorder toward the village. Others retired more slowly, stopping to look back regretfully at the closed gates, and eyeing the committee-men rather distrustfully; while a few desperate looking characters gathered in knots, and eagerly discussed the situation, and its possibilities of gain to themselves.

Higginson looked somewhat perturbed as he returned with Berkeley to the village inn.

"I'm afraid we made a muddle of it," he said.

"Nonsense! Newbold had it all cut and dried before we came. He knew the blow was coming, and he just wants to bluster a little."

"I don't know. That sort of man is apt to be very cool and determined."

"Then he must take the consequences."

"But what will they be? That's what troubles me. Legitimately we've no right to meddle with him if he don't choose to work his factories; but I'm afraid you've put it in the heads of the men that he can be compelled to."

"And so he can! It amounts to compulsion if he finds he can't afford to carry out his scheme. If he can't get men, except by paying fair wages, why, he'll pay them, won't he?"

"There'll be a big row first, I fear."

"So much the better. The man who fights, and tries every way to escape our control, gives us so much the grander victory, when he gives in."

By this time, they had reached the village, and found groups of half-tipsy men in every direction, who vociferously proclaimed their delight in the new state of affairs.

"These men mustn't get drunk in this fashion," said Higginson in tones of remonstrance. "It's against our rules" —

"You can't enforce rules just now!" interrupted Berkeley rather sensibly. "Wait until they're sober, and the first excitement's over. They seem to be pretty decent sort of men on the whole."

As they took their way to the railway station, their mission being ended for the present, the wild shouts, the drunken merriment, and the fierce oaths, which echoed on all sides, made even Berkeley wish he had been more moderate toward both the parties, between whom he was intended to mediate. Had he given even one thought to the interests of the seemingly weaker one?

CHAPTER XVI.

“THE WORK OF YOUR BROTHERHOOD.”

What's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us.

— SHAKESPEARE.

DURING the hour Marchant had to wait for another Archdale train, he had time to get over his extreme irritation, and to feel that it was just as well he had missed going with his intended colleagues. Upon reflection, and recalling his personal knowledge of Ralph Newbold, he was convinced that no amount of patience and moderation in their dealings with him was likely to have any effect toward producing a peaceful compromise. His natural antagonism toward him, as well as his new source of ill-will, based on Meta's mysterious

interest in him would, he knew, have made him quite as intemperate as the others; and he coveted above all else to be recognized as one who sought to harmonize, rather than to separate, the interests of the workmen and their employer. Thus, Marchant, full also of a strange weariness and languor, born of the turmoil of conflicting feelings which he had struggled through on that eventful day, was very well content to go at once to Pittsfield, and leave the other committeemen to complete their task without him. Their appointed interview with Ralph Newbold would be over before he could reach Archdale; and beyond that, they had no instructions, it being supposed some days or even weeks would be consumed in negotiations.

So Marchant settled himself comfortably for the longer journey before him, and having by this move gained some unexpected hours of leisure, which belonged to no duty, either at Archdale or Pittsfield, he gave himself up to unwonted dreaming. The fair, sad face of Meta Aberley flitted constantly before his mental vision; and strange as it was that one of her refined temperament and delicate physique should possess any attraction

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for his rough, sturdy brusqueness, his whole soul was filled with a desperate longing for her presence. While the splendid beauty of Mabel Vane had made so little impression on him, that even the consciousness of her readiness to be won had offered but a moment's temptation, Meta's pensive reserve had aroused in him a mad whirlwind of passion.

Unaccustomed to put constraint on his will or inclinations, Marchant chafed savagely as he recognized the many obstacles in his way. Meta's own indifference was cruelly clear under all her gentle courtesy of manner; and not only her grief from repeated bereavements, but his own instinctive perception of her utter separateness from him in every characteristic, seemed to build up an impenetrable barrier between them. Still he resolved to fight desperately for her favor, with that indomitable faith in the power of his will, which had been the great secret of his other successes.

Thus Marchant journeyed on, dreaming and planning as ever for the fulfillment of his resolves, although for once the glamor of heroic action in behalf of his fellows did not gild them

with their usual high inspiration. On reaching Pittsfield, the necessity of conferring with those who had arranged the next day's meeting, forced him to shake off his preoccupation, and to give himself actively to the duty before him. Then with some impatience, he waited till the last train came in, hoping Higginson and Berkeley would join him that night.

But when even the early morning did not bring them, he began to fear their mission had not resulted well; and he slowly mounted the platform at midday, gravely disquieted by his growing doubts and misgivings. Yet he spoke with all his wonted fire and force, carrying the crowd along with him in such a tumult of applause and enthusiasm, that when he closed his stirring appeal, his temples were throbbing with proud delight, and he received the thanks and congratulations of those around him with open exultation.

He was still standing there in the warm sunlight, looking wonderfully striking in his preëminent grandness of mien, seeming like an inspired prophet who had portrayed the eternal glories of the Heavens, rather than one who appealed to the sordid passions, the insatiable desire for money-

getting which so mightily swayed his hearers. The meeting was in effect over, and the crowd was slowly breaking into irregular masses, and beginning to melt away, when Berkeley and Higginson, hastening toward him in all the impatient hurry of men who have been vexatiously detained, paused half an instant to note the calm serenity that rested on his brow, the expression of earnest enthusiasm which beamed from his glowing eyes.

Beholding their tardy approach, Marchant beckoned them to hasten, while he signed to the crowd to wait.

"News!" he exclaimed eagerly. "News from Archdale!"

A great shout rang through the still air, as his hearers pressed closer to learn the intelligence so triumphantly announced. Marchant turned away his enraptured countenance, to listen to the details his colleagues brought him; but he was pale and stern with a strong revulsion of feeling as he again faced the crowd, and proclaimed, with a bitterness he could not control —

"The Archdale factories are closed."

"A strike?" came swelling from the throats of thousands in exulting glee.

"No; a lock-out!" replied Marchant in clear, unflinching tones, though his lips quivered with rage.

Curses and groans broke from the assembled crowd, and with unusual disorder they separated, wrangling among themselves over this reverse, and raging alike at their own leaders and the capitalists. "Between them," as one man gruffly expressed it, "they themselves were like to be ground to powder."

Marchant was too confounded, too bitterly disappointed to utter even a word of reproach to the unfortunate committee who brought the ill-tidings, but were probably not at all responsible for it. He had almost daily appointments for the next two weeks to speak in different towns, some of which were at quite a distance; and he tried to lose sight of this telling reverse, in all the continued excitement of such a round of duty. Yet often amid his finest utterances, its recollection would bring a sting, a sense of discouragement, that he could scarcely overcome.

At the end of the two weeks, he traveled night and day to reach Archdale, so wild was he to know how matters now stood there. With a

keenness that was half pain, he remembered his former visit there, his first address to the factory men, and his gruff answer to Ralph Newbold's pleasant words, his rejection of that courteously offered hand. Then, too, came to his memory the words spoken by that mysterious visitant, who, standing beneath his window, and concealed by the friendly darkness, had taunted him with his faith in the brotherhood, and had mocked him with suggestions of love's disturbing influence.

Nervous and ill at ease, beginning, too, to feel the terrible strain of his late exertions, Marchant shrank from facing the villagers at once, and turned aside, meaning to reach the factories by a short cut through the woods. He was curious to see how they looked in the silence and desolation that had taken the place of the busy tumult which he had witnessed in his younger days. He strode eagerly forward, full of the softening influence of olden memories, and almost with tears in his eyes, as he pictured to himself the scene of desolation that would presently break upon him.

But far different from his imagining was the reality. A disorderly, tumultuous throng of men surrounded the huge pile of buildings, whence

rose black clouds of curling smoke and threatening flashes of red flame showing how mutiny and discord were being crowned by fierce destruction.

Forgetful of how far he might himself be responsible for this awful deed, full only of horror to see such a wanton outrage committed, Marchant ran forward, crying shame on the men who could look on so tamely, and calling on them to help put out the flames.

"It's no use!" said one gruffly, catching him by the arm as he pressed forward. "There's no getting inside there without the keys of the big gate. Sanders has gone to see if he can get 'em" —

"But what caused it?" interrupted Marchant breathlessly. "Surely none of you would" —

"No; we're not so bad as that," answered the man, flushing under a sense of the unspoken suspicion.

"Not but what we'd a right, as your committee-man said," muttered another surlily. "He told us we owned the factories as much as the master himself, you know."

Ralph Newbold and his agent, John Stanton, now came upon the scene of action, having used

such haste in coming as to be fairly gasping for breath.

Ralph looked with intense anger on the burning buildings, and then turning to the crowd with such flashing eyes that they instinctively recoiled from him, he asked in ringing, indignant tones —

“Who did this cowardly thing?”

There was a moment's silence, and then as the demon of discord and rebellion awoke in those misguided hearts at the sound of his voice, a threatening chorus replied —

“You'd best find out for yourself. We've naught to do here.”

Stanton had hastened to unlock the long closed gates; but as he now threw them open, they only displayed such a mass of smoke and flames within, as to show that it was already too late to attempt to save the factories.

Ralph pressed as far as he dared within the archway, and Marchant, with two or three of the others, followed him. They quickly withdrew, however, as the blinding smoke began to pour forth from this outlet, while the flames within roared and crackled with renewed energy.

“There's no use, Stanton!” said Ralph, in

gloomy sternness, as he saw how every part of the building was burning too fiercely for any hope of the flames being got under. "The devils who've done this did their work well."

"Why suspect those poor fellows, Mr. Newbold?" said Marchant gently.

Ralph turned, and scanned him contemptuously from head to foot.

"Ah, it's you!" he said grimly. "You've come to make sure your plans are carried out!"

"Upon my soul, you are wrong!" cried Marchant, feeling more pained than offended at this. "It is far from our wish to see such shameful destruction of property."

"It is done, just the same!" muttered Ralph sullenly. "Stanton, the office will go, too, of course. Is there anything there" —

Stanton started, and said hurriedly —

"Yes, the books — and some papers of value."

Even as he spoke he sprang forward, and unlocked the door of the office. Ralph followed him, and as they disappeared within the open door, Marchant observed a sudden movement of uneasiness and alarm among a group of men who had been watching the conflagration with an air

of secret delight, which he did not like to see. Whether they could have had any hand in causing it, or were only rejoicing in what they regarded as a fortunate accident he could not tell; but he was mentally resolving to keep an eye on them, when a sudden outcry within the office startled him.

As he hurried toward it, a man came flying through the open door, which he caught and closed after an instant's desperate struggle, and then, turning the key in the lock, snatching it from the key-hole, and flinging it far through the archway into the seething flames within, he faced the crowd with a look of malicious triumph, as though challenging their admiration for his daring deed.

Marchant, however, was near enough to catch him by the arm, while he called on those nearest to him to break open both door and window of the office to liberate Ralph Newbold and his agent. There was a stir, and a moment's hesitation among the men he addressed, but they stood their ground evidently determined not to render even this assistance.

"Hold this rascal, then!" exclaimed Marchant angrily, as he thrust his captive into their hands,

while he attacked the fastenings of the windows single-handed. They were strongly barred, however, and padlocked besides; the keys to unfasten them were probably at the house, or perhaps in Stanton's pocket. At the same time, the prisoners were using every effort to break open the door, but without avail.

Marchant, appealing again and still vainly to the people to help him, saw with horror that some burning embers had fallen on the roof of the office. Again, he threw himself violently against the door, calling to those within to concentrate their efforts also in breaking it down. A sudden silence within alarmed him more than ever, as he feared the smoke from the roof, which was now a mass of flames might have overpowered them.

A number of the workmen, seeming now to realize for the first time, that Ralph was in actual danger, came running to Marchant's aid at this juncture. Contriving to climb to the roof over one another's shoulders, they tore away the burning shingles with their hands till they made an opening large enough to permit their entrance. It was then the work of but a few moments for Ralph and Stanton to be dragged forth, and lifted

to the ground, where the outstretched arms of others received and carried them off in safety.

Amid all this confusion, the man whom Marchant had left in the charge of those nearest him, had escaped, while the greater malcontents in the crowd began to slip away, seeming to feel mingling with their mutinous spirit, a shame that shrank from the light of day. Marchant, with his habit of keen observation, noticed all this, closely as he was engaged in looking after the two who had so nearly become the victims of the hostility he had himself helped to create.

Stanton was senseless from suffocation when they carried him out; but the fresh air soon revived him, and beyond a few burns on his hands, he was otherwise unhurt. But Ralph, struggling more desperately with the flames, and managing to keep on his feet nearly to the last, had stumbled then, and fallen forward on the smouldering embers. He was picked up instantly and carried off; but in that one moment, his face was horribly burned; and he lay now on the grass, moaning pitifully in the intense agony he was enduring.

Tenderly, and even with tears, some of his

long-faithful workmen, bore him to his lonely, desolate home. The physician, who was quickly summoned, soon soothed by his cooling appliances, the terrible burning; but he looked very grave, when Marchant asked if the injuries were serious.

"I cannot tell yet!" he said sadly. "But I fear—how did this happen? What madness tempted him into such danger?"

Marchant briefly described the occurrence as he had seen it, while the physician keenly watched him, as though puzzled by his thoughts.

"And this is the work of your brotherhood!" he said significantly.

"No, no!" cried Marchant, in strong agitation.

"It may not be your creed, but it results from it!" continued the physician. "These men were contented and happy till you stirred up discord between them and a master who was kind and just to a fault."

"But the man in the office was not one of us. He was probably an ordinary burglar," urged Marchant, with white, quivering lips.

"No; he seemed to show some personal spite."

"It is not just to credit such a calamity as this

to a cause that seeks only the best results!" cried Marchant warmly.

"Providence is stronger, and purer, and better than you," replied the physician gently. "Leave His work in His own hands in future."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A CRYING DISGRACE TO THE CAUSE."

For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.

— WATTS.

Ignorance never settles a question.

— DISRAELI.

MARCHANT, stung to the quick by the physician's words, and out of patience too, with the men who had brought such discredit on the cause of the brotherhood, by conduct that, if not actually a crime, bordered perilously upon it, hastened to the inn, and summoned to his presence the leaders among the factory-men, with whom he had formerly conferred.

They came with evident unwillingness, knowing as they did, the passionate force of the anger

which they were about to face; yet they dared not seem to admit, by refusing to come, they were responsible for the recent wrong-doing.

Marchant was walking up and down the small sitting-room, with head erect, and arms sternly folded on his breast, looking like a caged lion to the three men who now entered. Scarcely vouchsafing any form of greeting, he angrily exclaimed, as he paused in his rapid walk, and fixed his flashing eyes on their downcast countenances —

“Now, then, what does this infamous outrage mean? You’ve got a great notion of what your rights are, upon my word!”

“Truly, Mr. Marchant!” said Stebbins, who stood nearest to him, trying to look at ease under this accusing address, “I don’t believe, sir, that any of our men — leastwise, none of the steady factory-men — had a hand in this.”

“What do you mean by ‘steady factory-men’?” retorted Marchant.

“The old hands, sir! — them as has worked faithful for Mr. Newbold, and the Squire before him.”

“Who did it, then?” was the short, sharp reply.

"Indeed, sir, we don't rightly know. Mayhap, 'twas the man that was in the office; but I don't see how he got there, anyway."

"He couldn't have started the fire," said Warren, as Stebbins looked appealingly at him for support. "He was locked in himself, it seemed, and" —

"That's easily explained!" returned Marchant impatiently, who knew all the ins and outs of the factory-buildings. "There's a passage-way from the basement of the factory into the office. You must all know that!"

"I'd forgotten it!" said Warren; "but I don't see" —

"Why, the fellow must have scrambled over the paling somewhere and taken his time to start the fires, for it was easy to see, when the gates were opened, that the buildings had been fired in a dozen places. Then, he's had no way to escape except through the office, where, if Newbold and Stanton had stayed away, he would have been nicely roasted in his own trap, as the cowardly rascal deserved!"

"Now don't say that, Mr. Marchant, sir!" chimed in the third man, Brown, very timidly.

"It's awful cruel, sir, to talk of burning a man to death in that way!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Marchant, turning on Brown so savagely that he shrank in great alarm behind his companions. "You didn't seem to mind Mr. Newbold's getting hurt so badly!"

"Oh, well!—he—you see, sir, he put himself in the way of it, to save his own books. He took his chances, as it were"—

"Chances?" echoed Marchant, his eyes flaming like burning coals, while his voice rang out with such indignant earnestness that the landlord in alarm opened the door and peeped in, with a score of anxious faces peering over his shoulders. "Chances?" repeated Marchant. "Let me tell you the brotherhood undertakes no such chances as these for employer or employed. This deed is a crying disgrace to the cause, and I shall ferret out that wretch and bring him to punishment, though he were my own brother."

His lips whitened suddenly as this last word fell from them, and he leaned his hand on the back of a chair to steady himself, as he caught a few disjointed words from the outer room, whose import he comprehended only too well. And yet,

remembering how he had grasped that man's arm and held him prisoner for a moment, he knew well enough that it was not his brother, but a younger and more active man. Nerving himself again from the momentary horror of that passing thought, he went on with calm resoluteness —

“There is one thing to be distinctly understood by you all. Our brotherhood does not encourage crime, or permit its members to commit outrages like this. Some of you seem to think it's just a holiday, in which you are paid for being idle. Don't imagine the contributions of hard-working brothers elsewhere, will be given to men here, who spend it in rioting and drunkenness, if not worse. This matter has got to be sifted down to the very dregs. You leaders must go over the roll, and report every man who cannot show a clean record since the day the factories were closed. Those who have in any way shared in or encouraged the commission of this crime must be dropped from the rolls at once. Their further punishment I will look after myself.”

“But, Mr. Marchant, sir!” remonstrated Stebbins, “surely that's hard on the men. You can't expect the steadiest of us to be idle day

after day, and not to get in trouble one way or another!"

"Do you mean that?" asked Marchant, with a sudden change of tone.

"Surely, yes, sir! It's not in human nature, sir!"

"If I thought that," murmured Marchant; "if I thought the brotherhood could not stand that test, that in seeking to improve the condition of all workingmen, we are demoralizing even the best and steadiest of them, till they are capable of committing crimes like these, then I should — but, no! it can't be possible! What do fellows like you know of the working of the mighty forces we have brought to bear on this question? Because some of you are weak — because idleness has been a temptation, rather than a lesson to you — is no reason why the glorious fabric we have erected, shall not stand on its firm foundation forever!"

Then more composedly he added —

"You must do as I have directed. Bring me the report this evening, and beware how you try to shield from his just punishment a man that even smiled at that scene of horror and devastation."

"It's hard lines!" muttered one man from the doorway. "When we've done your bidding, and defied a good master that always treated us fairly well, now you're going to shut down on us too. It's a lively time we'll be having now, I'm thinking, between the two of ye."

Marchant winced, as this shot struck home too surely on his conscience; but he silently dismissed them by a gesture, and flashed on them a look of proud defiance, as they sullenly retired.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR.

Talk not of wasted affection, affection never was wasted,
If it enrich not the heart of another, its waters, returning
Back to their springs, like the rain, shall fill them full of
refreshment,
That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the
fountain.

— LONGFELLOW.

MARCHANT was more composed and dignified when Stebbins and Warren returned that evening in compliance with his very peremptory order. But of little avail had been the efforts they professed to have made to discover such delinquents as should need to be made examples of. The conflagration could not be traced, or attributed to any one except the fortunate unknown, whose escape made him a convenient

victim, on whose shoulders all the wrong-doing could be safely laid.

Marchant questioned and stormed in vain. No definite information implicating any one else was to be had.

"Where's Brown?" he asked suspiciously, as he noticed that timid worthy's absence.

"His wife's sick—he couldn't come!" pleaded Stebbins very deferentially.

"Well! do you stick to it that you can't find any disaffected or lukewarm member of the order, that none of our men had a hand in the fire?"

"It stands to reason, sir,"—began Stebbins.

"Never mind that!" impatiently interrupted Marchant. "I'm sick of all this shuffling and prevaricating. One thing I see my way clear to do. Stone and Fisher, in whose hands I placed that rascal when I caught him, will have to be responsible for letting him go. You'll just notify them they are suspended from the order and from a share of the distributed funds, until they produce him; I've no doubt they know where to find him."

"But, sir, they'll never stand that! Stone and Fisher are among our strongest"—

"Tut! tut! They'd better show their zeal in some less doubtful fashion, then. If they think it serves the order either to wink at crimes, or to commit them, they'll find they're mistaken, that's all! You can give them twenty-four hours to come to terms. I'll be absent a few hours to-morrow; but will receive your report here in the evening."

He checked their attempted protest against his decision, and arbitrarily dismissed them; feeling really in great need of rest and quiet after the annoyance and excitement of the day.

In the morning, refreshed and strengthened by the long sleep, whose dreams were too entrancing to disturb him, he seemed another man, as he strode with free, vigorous step to the station. His brow was serene, and his eyes full of a deep, tender light, while thoughts of Meta, and the sweet welcome he looked for, when he should again stand by her open window, filled him with un wonted delight.

On reaching Fairfield, he hurried through the woods towards Wilkins' cottage, not caring to encounter the Rainsfords if he could help it. Presently he paused, with a quickened throbbing

of his pulses, as through a little vista beneath the branches he saw Meta's fair head bowed industriously over her work, while even the busy movement of her hands was visible.

Meta started and looked up in genuine surprise, as that strong, eager step paused beneath her window. But his ardent gaze caused her eyes to droop again shyly in unwonted embarrassment, while the fingers he clasped so warmly, trembled as she hastily withdrew them from his grasp.

"You startled me!" she said simply, as he regarded her reproachfully. "I thought you were miles away."

"I have been! That long tour I told you of, has kept me busy indeed," he said, finding a crumb of comfort in the notion of having sometimes occupied her thoughts during his absence.

"And Archdale?" she asked, trying to speak unconcernedly; but the tell-tale tremor of her lips, and the anxiety her eyes betrayed, chafed Marchant sorely.

"Archdale!" he repeated sullenly.

"Yes; when you left me, you were going to see—that is—it was something about the factory-men, I think."

"Oh!" he replied with apparent carelessness, but watching her keenly the while; "I didn't go after all, I missed the train."

"How could you?" she said somewhat regretfully. "You had plenty of time, surely."

"I stopped in the town!" he replied briefly, biting his lips angrily as he remembered his bootless errand at the jail.

"Then nothing has been done!" and Meta's unmistakeable relief irritated him afresh.

"The others went."

"Ah!" she murmured with an air of alarm that she could not conceal; "and what was done?—tell me!"

"Why do you care?" he asked suspiciously.

"I—I—knew some people in Archdale!" she answered nervously. "There's Mrs. Burton, whose husband works in the factory, and"—

"May be you've a sweetheart among the men!" and Marchant's harsh, strident voice startled her so by its tone of anger, that she scarcely noticed his coarse words.

As she turned her eyes in perplexed wonder on his darkly-flushed face, the fair innocence of her own reproved him as no words could have done.

"Forgive me!" he said penitently; "I ought not to have said that."

"Still you do not tell me!" she persisted, too absorbed in her torturing anxiety to answer his apology.

"There's not much to tell!" he replied moodily. "Newbold heard what the committee had to propose, and said he'd give an answer in the morning; which he did, sure enough."

"How?" she cried breathlessly.

"By ordering the factory gates to be locked against the men."

"And that means " —

Meta's puzzled tones showed how far she was from understanding the magnitude of the act.

"That he won't come to terms," replied Mr. Marchant.

"Oh, the poor men!" Meta murmured sadly.

"They're well enough off! They get their allowance, and have nothing to do, while Newbold is losing money every day."

"And that is all?" she asked earnestly.

"Not quite. I stopped there yesterday to see if Newbold was holding out, and I found " —

"The gates open again—the men at work!" she exclaimed ardently.

"No! those gates will never open or close again. The buildings are now a heap of ashes."

Meta's cry sent a new pang of doubt and dread to his heart; and he stared angrily at her for a moment, when she clasped her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out a horrible sight.

"Go on!" she gasped presently, with a shudder of horror.

"There was no finding out who did it," Marchant replied impatiently; and then with a glow of renewed interest in the scene as he recalled it, he went on to describe all its incidents. Meta listened in silent breathlessness, till he spoke of Newbold's encountering the probable incendiary in the office. Then she bent forward, grasping Marchant's arm with a force of which she was unconscious, a faint cry breaking from her white lips, as he lightly referred to the treacherous act, which had so nearly been fatal to Newbold and Stanton. Without having the least suspicion of Meta's interest in this scene, Mr. Marchant was far from giving it the full force of the reality, scarcely mentioning Ralph's injuries; and she

drew a long breath of relief, as she leaned back in her chair again, saying bitterly —

“And such violence, such wanton destruction of property are the teaching of your order!”

“Never!” he exclaimed. “We will punish severely any member” —

“Were they not all members?” she asked.

“Yes; but in the disorder incident upon such changes” —

“The changes are in fault, then. As long as these men remained faithful to their employer, such crimes were impossible.”

“I hoped we had your sympathy and good wishes!” said Marchant, cruelly rebuffed by her indignant tone.

“So long as you seemed intent only on bettering the workingman’s condition, you had; but I can have no sympathy with wrongs like these.”

He looked in her face with such wistful gentleness, that it moved her almost to tears.

“I think you do not comprehend how you hurt me,” he said slowly. “I have looked to you as my one source of sweet comfort in every discouragement. I have dreamed of a future in which

we would work hand in hand, for the cause. Surely you will not say me nay! You have seen how dear you are to me" —

"Oh, hush!" interrupted Meta, utterly confounded by his unexpected words. "Never — never! How could I have imagined" —

"You did not know? And I — fool that I was! — I believed that you cared" —

"Not in that way! How could you be so mad?" and Meta wrung her hands in almost as much anger as regret.

"Yes; it was a madness — a sweet madness!" he uttered, with such a hopeless ring in his voice that Meta could but pity his suffering amid all her own turmoil of feeling. "You were so kind — so patient!" he added sadly.

"I was sorry for you," she said quietly.

"Sorry? Why?" asked Marchant, who had never before known what it was to be pitied, but had felt himself rather an object of envy.

"You seemed so lonely and desolate! I fancied there must have been some terrible pain and trial in your past life from which you were taking refuge in your work for the brotherhood. It seemed so hard that you had no other plan of life,

no real interest in which you could find contentment, if not happiness?"

"You have not then believed I adopted this work from principle?" asked Marchant, too profoundly astonished to feel even anger at her words.

"How could I?" she replied anxiously. "The way Providence works must surely be the right way."

"What has Providence to do" —

"Everything!" she interposed. "Providence adjusts all these questions more wisely than we can, and more successfully, too. Providence don't burn up factories, and turn hundreds of men adrift into utter idleness, under pretense of raising their wages."

"Tell me!" Marchant said, after a moment, not choosing to answer this line of argument, and not comprehending that Meta sought to avoid the theme of which his own mind was so full. "Is it for this you refuse me—because you cannot share the aims I have adopted for my life-work?"

"My interests are all on the other side," she said gently.

"And this Newbold—what is he to you?" and Marchant's voice lost its momentary softness,

as he desperately uttered the suspicion which was taking form in his mind.

Meta's eyes drooped suddenly, and a deep flush came into her cheek. She was silent for one perplexed moment, trying to find some way of answering him, without betraying her secret; but he, crushed into utter hopelessness by the agitation for which he could only find one meaning, went on, impetuously —

“I could have borne your mere indifference — I could have hoped still that my humble patience, my deep, passionate love, might have won some return, if I had to wait years for your relenting! — but it was cruel to let me go on loving you, till my love has taken such hold of me, that I can never more overcome it, and all the time this man that I have always hated” —

“Hated!” and Meta flashed on him a glance of such indignation, that Marchant checked his words in sudden dismay, as she added, wrathfully —

“What cause have you to hate him? What harm has he done to you?”

“Harm enough, from beginning to end!” he answered bitterly. “If all else were nothing, can I forgive him this new wrong? You don't

understand what it is for a man of my years, my strong, rugged nature, to have learned to love any one as I love you! If it don't kill me, or drive me mad—" and he bowed his head on his arms with a groan, a strangled sob, that moved Meta strangely.

"I am sorry!" she whispered gently. "I was so absorbed in my sorrow, I never thought such a fancy would come into your mind. But don't let it bring you harm! Don't believe your having loved me need break you down! In my cruellest grief, I could never have wished not to have known the dear ones I have lost. Love, true love, if it does not bless another's life, ought to fill one's own heart with sweetness."

Marchant raised his head, showing a face so white and strained in its misery, that Meta's tears now fell fast.

"If it is possible!" he said in a hoarse whisper, "if I can ever show you how I have loved you, I will have found something to live for."

He took her hand and held it an instant. Then with a long, lingering look, as though he were bidding her farewell forever, he left her while she was still trying to control her bitter tears.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHAT'S TO BECOME OF US?"

Rather the ground that's deep enough for graves,
Rather the stream that's strong enough for waves,
 Than the loose sandy drift.
Whose shifting surface cherishes no seed
Either of any flower or any weed,
 Whichever way it shift.

—OWEN MEREDITH.

MARCHANT, having abruptly closed his interview with Meta much sooner than he had imagined would have been the case, wandered aimlessly in the park at first. Knowing how long he would have to wait for his train if he proceeded at once to the station, and dreading the officious looks and questions of those he might meet there, he strove in that shaded seclusion to nerve himself for calmly facing the outer world

without betraying his secret anguish. One flash of comfort had crossed his mind, as he remembered Ralph Newbold's usual haughty reserve toward his inferiors. Even if he had come to love this gentle woman, Marchant thought, who, with all her sweet grace and refinement, was still one of the people, he would never have dreamed of marrying her. Meta's silence under Marchant's accusation apparently admitted its truth, but there was nothing of happy, hopeful love in her pensive sadness. Her utter indifference to himself, however, was too manifest for this little ray of hope to grow into any steady brightness; and he at length cleared his gloomy brow with resolute firmness, and tried, as he walked composedly toward the town, to fix all his thoughts on the duties before him. During one moment of languid depression, he wondered how he could ever have been absorbed in what now seemed so wearisome; but his strong will controlled even his own weakness, and at his imperative summons, the ardent enthusiasm of former days again sent the warm blood flowing quickly in his veins, while a light of steady resolve gleamed in his eyes, dispersing all their gloom and heaviness.

He had need of all his patience and strength when he reached Archdale. He found the place in unusual ferment. The factory-men hung about the streets in disorderly groups, showing not only the excitement of drink, but also an uneasiness, a sullen moroseness that boded evil to Marchant's experienced eye. Unwilling to come into conflict with this evidently mutinous temper until he could learn its meaning, Marchant turned at once toward Stebbins' house; but he met him at the next corner, arguing with a number of men, who seemed bent on some violent course, from which he sought to persuade them.

At sight of Marchant, Stebbins faltered and was silent while the men surveyed the new-comer with an unspoken menace in their fierce gaze, which at once startled and angered him.

"What is going on here?" asked Marchant impetuously.

"The men are getting uncommon hard to manage, sir!" responded Stebbins, looking greatly harassed. "They're that unreasonable" —

"I don't see what you've got to manage them about!" interrupted Marchant sternly. "What's the trouble?"

"Well! they're fretting about the factories being burned, for one thing" —

"We're thinkin' we're likely to have bad times 'tween all you masters!" said a gruff-looking fellow, facing Marchant with an air that was at once insolent and threatening.

"Yes," chimed in another "you've shown us already, by the way you've treated Stone and Fisher, how little we can depend on you for support, once you take a notion to turn us adrift. And now that the factories are burned, what'll we do if we wanted the master to take us on again?"

"Do you?" questioned Marchant, with angry contempt in his sharp tones.

"We want to settle down to something! We don't want to be hanging round idle, with winter coming on, too."

"You shouldn't have burned the factories!" said Marchant scoffingly.

"We didn't! — you know well enough yourself, sir, it was none of us factory men."

"It was a fellow that's been hanging round here lately!" said the first speaker. "I was nigh about sure of it, when he came springing out of the office."

"Why didn't you say so before?" asked Mr. Marchant.

"It was none of my business—and 'taint now, I s'pose—only we factory-men ain't going to take the credit or the shame of it ourselves."

Marchant saw clearly enough that the men had fallen under some new influence which had seriously shaken their faith in the brotherhood's power to help and protect them.

"What has made this change?" he asked of Stebbins in a low tone.

"Well, it's mostly that, as they cool down, they get thinking—and then, the master's getting hurt works on them. You see, sir, they've been uncommon fond of him, boy and man."

"But he's not hurt so seriously."

"Haven't you heard? It's but an hour ago they telegraphed for another doctor. They're afeared for his eyes. They do say he'll never use 'em again."

Low as Stebbins spoke, the others caught enough of what he said to have all their remorseful fury revived.

"He was a good master!" cried one, shaking his fist in the air, and glaring savagely at Mar-

chant. "If you'd let us alone, all this devil's work would never have been done. We'd have had our factories and our week's wages, and the master'd been about with us, same as ever, God bless him!"

"And now!" said another, half blubbering, "if the master is never to see his boys again, if there's never work again to be done for him, what's to become of us? Are ye going to take care of us forever—or was it only to get us all ruined, that ye began with it?"

Marchant was so overwhelmed with pain and horror at Ralph Newbold's cruel injury, that he had stood all this while in dazed silence, scarcely hearing these reproaches. But now, recovering himself by a great effort, he spoke earnestly—

"I am very sorry for this! None of you can feel more for Mr. Newbold's hurt than I do. I had not understood it was so serious. For yourselves, I hope you will try to be patient till some arrangement can be made. If the factories are not rebuilt"—

"Who's to build them? It must have near about ruined the master."

"No doubt they were insured!" gravely con-

tinued Marchant. "If Mr. Newbold don't put them up again, I dare say some one else will. Either way, there's always work enough for every one in the world. If it isn't here" —

"But we won't be driven from our homes!" exclaimed several at once; "you must find us work here!"

Marchant turned away wearily. These fretful, discontented men with their whims and complaints discouraged him terribly. Presently he controlled his annoyance with an effort, and was about to again address the men, hoping to inspire them with a cheery self-reliance, when a half-drunken fellow came staggering toward them, making a great outcry of noisy grief.

"The master!" he blubbered, fairly choking between his tears and his efforts to speak; "he'd never a hard word for any one; he'd have given his own right hand to help one of us — and we — we've killed him among us!"

"Dead?" cried Marchant, turning terribly pale at this.

"It's as bad — he's ruined! He'll never hold up his head again!"

The fellow, in a pitiful maudlin grief, that was

very touching in its way, now put his head down on his arms and sobbed bitterly.

Marchant, not knowing what to believe, said hastily to Stebbins —

“I must go at once to inquire into this.”

Before Stebbins could answer, he was striding rapidly away toward the manor-house, full of the deepest pity for the man whom one hour ago he had so vehemently hated.

His alarm was not removed by the vague, unsatisfying answers the servants gave. They only knew the master was very ill; that his face was so covered with bandages no one could tell how bad the burns were except the doctor and nurse, and they knew that fears were entertained of his eyesight being fatally injured. To-morrow, when the new doctor had seen him, may be they'd have better news.

Marchant shut himself up in his room at the inn, full of a cruel remorse, in which was mingled a still more terrible doubt. Was his work indeed worthy, if it could produce results like these? Perhaps elsewhere, in strange places where the history and the antecedents of the people were alike unknown to him, he might never have questioned

the working of his creed so closely. But here, where much of his early life had been passed, where he knew in its every detail all the pleasant relations that had subsisted between master and man, all the peaceful, steady habits of the villagers, and the rarity of crime and disorder in their midst; he could not fail to see how his efforts had thus far produced only discord and suffering. He felt more keenly than ever the one strongest drawback that belonged to the brotherhood. It was of necessity composed almost entirely of illiterate, unthinking men, who had to be swayed as masses, had to be guided and governed, but could never be left to their own devices, or trusted with the leading power. Their orators and rulers were men of exceptional force, whose influence was often wonderful; but the seed they sowed fell on soil incapable of perfecting new seed. They must patiently renew their efforts, day by day, and they must be content to see, at the best, an occasional amelioration in the condition of those they sought to benefit. How often would this partial and temporary gain be overbalanced by the cruel wrong and suffering which should also result from their labors?

CHAPTER XX.

FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP.


Thine to work as well as pray,
Clearing thorny wrongs away;
Plucking up the weeds of sin,
Letting Heaven's warm sunshine in.

— WHITTIER.

ARTHUR MANNING had been absent from Archdale while these scenes of wild disorder were being enacted. Coming back to his pretty little rectory, full of cheery thoughts, and of pleasant remembrances of the friends with whom he had been staying, he walked up the path with his usual blithe, active step, and paused in the doorway, to turn and contemplate the quiet landscape before him. The lengthening shadows brought a refreshing coolness after the midday sultriness, and the level rays of the setting sun

shone in golden glory on the varied loveliness of the scene. Full of content, as many satisfactory recollections of his parish work awoke amid these familiar surroundings, the rector looked up very smilingly, as his housekeeper came out to greet him. Her eager, flurried manner, however, startled him from his dreams of repose, and filled him with vague alarm, even before her hurried, broken speech acquainted him with the disasters which had taken place.

A few hasty words fell from his lips as she recounted the madness of the people, and the lengths to which Mr. Marchant's influence had tempted them ; but when she spoke of Ralph Newbold's injuries, a storm of indignant anger swept over Arthur Manning's gentle face, and its lines at once assumed a rigid sternness, that showed the intense feeling he was striving to control. Scarcely trusting himself to the utterance of one word, he hastened with quick strides across the bit of woodland which separated the rectory from Archdale manor-house. Picturing his friend, his dearly-loved companion of school and college days, as suffering, frightfully disfigured, and perhaps blinded for life, it seemed to his impatient



regard, that the short distance before him was interminable.

He arrived just as the consultation with the new doctor was over; and while trembling and deadly pale in his exceeding apprehension, he asked, more by an imploring gesture than by the question his lips could scarcely frame, what the fateful decision was, that held so much of his friend's future in the balance.

Dr. Warner, his skillful associate in all his parish ministering, who had grown gray and venerable in Archdale, and had held the hapless Ralph as an infant in his arms, could only turn aside as he met Arthur Manning's eager look, and leave it to his more composed colleague to answer him.

"We find Mr. Newbold in a very sad state!" observed that great professional authority, Dr. Sherwood, speaking with caution as he saw how cruelly agitated the young man was. "His face is one mass of burns; but that is of less importance, as they will surely heal without much scarring. The great danger is to his eyesight; and that" —

"You don't mean," gasped Arthur Manning, "that it will never" —

"We don't say that—we hope for the best," interposed Dr. Warner gently. "We can't tell for some days yet how it will end."

Arthur sank into a chair, with a groan of deep anguish, and covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out the horror these words called up.

The two medical gentlemen exchanged pitying glances, and moved toward the door, as Dr. Sherwood was in haste to catch the next train, Dr. Warner only pausing to whisper kindly—

"Run up to see him as soon as you feel more composed. It will do him good to hear your voice. Only be as cheerful as possible, for he is greatly depressed."

In another moment, Arthur stood by Ralph's side, pale as death, indeed, but that the hapless invalid could not see. His true, courageous heart controlled his voice into tones so tenderly soothing, that an inspiration of vague hope crept into the lonely heart, which for so long had known only the gloomiest, most despairing thoughts.

"Is it you, Arthur?" he asked wistfully. "It is hard to have a face like yours so near me, and yet be forbidden to look on it."

"We have met too often, dear old fellow!"

returned Arthur brightly, "for you to have any uncertainty what my face is like. Just imagine we are talking in the dark, as we used to at school — do you remember?"

"Don't I? Do you know, Arthur, that those days at school and college, when I used to imagine so many wonderful schemes for happiness and success in after life, were, after all, the most contented days I have ever known?"

"I think all men feel that, as they look back upon their boyhood; but I doubt if it's the actual truth. You forget the little trials, the boyish scrapes, that made a dark background to our bright moments then, and were fully as real and as painful as the troubles which press so hard in after life."

Ralph shook his head despondently.

"It is not so much whether or no our dreams are realized," he said slowly; "but actual realities tell the tale most surely. Then, as a substantial framework to all my visions, I had my father — my sister" —

He faltered and paused, as this long silent word fell from his lips.

"Tell me of her!" said Arthur encouragingly,

as he took his friend's hand again in his cordial grasp, and pressed it warmly. "I know how your father's death came, as you were leaving college, placing at once on your shoulders, the burden of mastership here; but the little sister you were so fond of, I have never heard you mention in these later days that we've been together again."

"But you know" — murmured Ralph hoarsely.

"Only the vaguest outlines. Tell me, Ralph! It will help you to bear this new trouble by turning your thoughts to that greater grief."

Ralph hesitated a moment, and then burst out vehemently —

"She was so pure and gentle, how was I ever to believe she could go wrong. Thank God, my father never guessed it."

"Guessed what?" asked Arthur, in low tones of terrible dread.

"That she could forget herself and stoop to that low scoundrel, Aberley, who was so unfortunately thrown in her way! Imagine my proud, high-born sister marrying our agent's son! The scamp was scheming enough to use his opportunities, while my dying father had no suspicion of what was going on."

"I wonder you never told me."

"I couldn't, Arthur. It has been a bitter shame to me all these years, and I've tried not to have the world know of it."

"And where is your sister now?" inquired Arthur, with a firmness in his gentle tones that made Ralph turn his head away uneasily.

"How should I know—or care?" he muttered, half angrily.

"You could not lose sight of her! You would feel the necessity of watching the result of her ill-advised act, and of being ready to protect her from any evil consequences."

Ralph restlessly moved himself in his easy-chair, and shrank instinctively from the searching glance he was conscious of, even without being able to see it.

As he did not answer, Arthur went on with grave persistence —

"Do you indeed know nothing of her fate? Do you even know if she is living?"

"Yes, I know that much!" answered Ralph reluctantly, as his friend's pause compelled him at last to speak. "It is not many days since she was here."

"Here?" echoed Arthur eagerly.

"Not in the house; but she spoke to me on the road, near the village. She—she wanted help—she said"—

Ralph's voice broke suddenly, and he had to choke down a bitter moan, as he remembered Meta's pitiful pleading, which he, in the pride of his strength and manhood, had so cruelly denied.

Arthur waited patiently, welcoming in his heart this burst of feeling, and wondering how far his proposed task of reconciliation was already in the way to be accomplished.

As he did not speak, Ralph presently asked in tones of despondent pain —

"Why have you brought all this back again? I was fair enough with the girl, considering the disgrace of her conduct. She told me of Aberley's death; and I would have taken her home again" —

"And she would not come?" asked Arthur.

"She would not give up her child," replied Ralph, with a sudden sense of the unworthiness of his having made such a condition.

"Naturally!" replied his friend warmly.

"Well, there's two opinions about that! One

would think the brother she had known all her life would be dearer than a brat" —

"Hush!" and Arthur's voice took a sternness Ralph had not often heard from his gentle friend.

"In these long hours of helpless pain, with perhaps days of dreary inaction before you, have you no wish that your sister should forgive that cruel repulse, and come home to soothe and comfort you with her care?"

"Forgive!" muttered Ralph; "I think it is I who" —

"No, she never willingly offended or outraged you. Her impulses, however misdirected, had no touch of personal ill-will toward you. You, who have spurned her from your door, when she came to you in her weakness and despair, have need to humble yourself very meekly before her now."

"Arthur!" cried Ralph hotly, "do you dare to say this to me — now, above all" —

"Yes; now, above all," repeated his friend very tenderly. "Now, when God's hand has brought you so low — when He has taken from you the power and independence in which you so trusted; now, when He waits to see you rise above your sufferings, and make them the stepping-stones to

a new and purer content. The one wrong act of your life stands waiting to be blotted out by your repentance now."

An impulse of furious anger had swept over Ralph's soul when Arthur began speaking; but as his solemn words came, one by one, like accusing angels, overpowering him with the strong force of their truth, a wave of softer feeling flooded his consciousness with its sweet influence.

An utter silence prevailed for some moments, and then Arthur added gently —

"Shall I try to find her, Ralph, and bring her to you?"

Ralph only closed his fingers strongly round his friend's hands, as he whispered hoarsely —

"Where will you" —

"There must be some way of tracing her," replied Arthur composedly, and feeling with glad content that the momentous conflict was over, and he had won a great victory.

"Mrs. Burton, in the village, may know," said Ralph, in shame-faced acceptance of the service he could not have asked for. "She was Meta's nurse, you know," he added.

"Ah!" commented Arthur, comprehending at

last the mysterious bond between that worthy but humble soul, and the refined Meta, which had so puzzled him by its inequality. "Well, I'll do my best to bring you the comfort you are longing for," he went on cheerily. "And now, shall I stay with you to-night, old fellow—or would you rather be left alone?"

Ralph hesitated; and then said shyly—

"If Meta's coming" —

"You'd rather have her do so at once. I understand. Well, then I'll say good-night, and start on my quest the first thing in the morning."

This was evidently Ralph Newbold's secret desire, although he shrank from openly expressing it.

A few more words of cordial good-will, a long, lingering pressure of Ralph's hand, and then Arthur sped joyously homeward, full of delight over his success.

He had not betrayed to Ralph his knowledge of Meta's place of refuge, feeling that her own consent to the revelation must first be obtained. Recognizing how strongly she had the right to resent her brother's cruel repulse, Arthur felt he had but half accomplished the hoped-for reconcili-

ation, till he should also have won her to forgive the wrong, that could never be quite atoned for, while her child's untimely death rested in her memory. Still he felt he could quickly prevail with that sweet, womanly nature, when he had won the hot-tempered, impetuous Ralph into making him his ambassador. Having resolved to go to Fairfield by the first morning train, he was now eager to seek the rest which he sorely needed after so much fatigue and excitement.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARK CLOUD'S SILVER LINING.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

— HERBERT.

META was filled with gentle regret for Mr. Marchant's disappointment, comprehending from the tone of his last words, how utterly he felt lost and shipwrecked in losing the sweet hope he had so confidently entertained. Very sadly she recalled his eager, passionate words, though she smiled faintly at his natural misconception of her interest in Ralph Newbold, which, because it was not easy to explain it, she had let pass without comment. As she presently began

to picture to herself the scene of desolation at the Archdale factories, and imagined the groups of idle, sullen workmen wandering through the village ripe for any new mischief that might occur to them, she felt with a strong shudder of repulsion, how impossible it would have been for her to share Marchant's wild theories of reform, when they bore such fruit as this. Then, lightly as he had passed over Ralph's injuries, not having realized them himself at the time, Meta felt in her heart a mingled tide of regret, and of reviving affection for the brother whom she had once loved so tenderly, as she thought of his loneliness and possible suffering, with only alien hands to tend him. Taking, for the first time, a calm retrospect of her estrangement from Ralph and its cause, she felt, now that the glamor of an impulsive love no longer blinded her to the errors into which she had been hurried, that she had been indeed rash and misguided in thus braving the too exacting control that sought to restrain her. Might she not, by a little patience and forbearance, have won the consent she had too readily abandoned hope of obtaining? Were not the scenes of violence and discord that had so wrecked the fair

beauty of Archdale, due somewhat to the irritation and unhappiness of the brother whom she had outraged?

Taking herself thus severely to task and seeing too late the mistake, whose results had wrecked two lives already, Meta erred now on the side of repentance, and was full of eager desire to humble herself at her brother's very feet, and to implore the forgiveness she craved. Impressed with this overwhelming regret, she fretted herself into positive unhappiness before the day was over; and as she laid her weary head upon her pillow that night, slumber refused to rest upon her heavy eyelids till she had calmed her nervous excitement by resolving to return to Archdale the next day.

She rose in the morning still cherishing this intention, and she was preparing to acquaint Mrs. Rainsford with it, when the light, quick step of Arthur Manning sounded upon her ears, as he walked eagerly up the path. With a sudden premonition of evil, Meta hastened to meet him at the door, and as he took her hand quietly in his, he was puzzled by her look of anxious inquiry.

"You bring me news!" she murmured falter-

ingly, with trembling lips that vainly essayed to steady themselves.

He knew not how to answer her for a moment, in his fear of too greatly alarming her with the intelligence that must bring such a shock of horror.

Partly understanding his hesitation, Meta said impetuously —

“Do not fear to speak! I’ve done with all disguises. You must know—some one must have told you” —

“Why do you think that?” he asked, in perplexed uncertainty as to her meaning.

“Because you would not come to me in this way if you did not know—if you had not some terrible thing to tell me,” she cried passionately. “Oh! can’t you see how cruelly you are trying me?”

“You have heard already” — he began.

“Of Ralph’s troubles—of his being hurt—yes! Only tell me it is not” —

Arthur Manning silently led her to a seat, and as she gladly took it, for she was trembling so that she could hardly stand, he said gravely —

“I don’t know how much you have heard; but

I came to entreat your presence and care for Ralph."

"I have been wishing—I meant to go this morning. I could not bear to be away any longer. But will he let me"—

"He sent me for you."

"Ah!" with a faint cry as she clasped her hands wildly together. "That must mean something terrible indeed! If he sent—oh! tell me, tell me!"

As she struggled vainly to suppress her sobs, and to put her awful dread into words, Arthur hastened to reassure her as far as possible.

"Don't be so alarmed!" he said soothingly. "It is not what you think. We had a long talk last night, and I left him sitting in his chair, very eager to have me hurry away that I might bring back the sister he has been missing so wofully all these weary months.

Meta looked at him in astonishment.

"I fancied he was ill—dying!" she said, in low, hollow tones.

"He is not well," returned Arthur, puzzled to guess how much she had already been told. "You know of the factory fire?" he added.

"Oh, yes! and Mr. Marchant told me Ralph was hurt; but it could not have been so bad, if you left him sitting up. You frightened me horribly!" and Meta tried to smile as she lifted her eyes bravely to his face.

Something in its expression quickly checked that fleeting smile, however, and she exclaimed in renewed excitement —

"Tell me! I know you are keeping something back!"

He felt it was indeed most merciful to tell her the exact truth, and with tenderest sympathy of word and tone, he revealed all Ralph's pitiable condition, and the grave fears they entertained for his sight.

Meta bore the shock with wonderful fortitude, seeming at first to feel so strongly the relief of knowing his life was not threatened, that she did not fully realize the dark shadow which still hovered over him.

At length, with a deep sigh of pain mingled with gladness that her estrangement from Ralph was ended even amid these adverse clouds, Meta asked thoughtfully —

"You say this was last night! How could

you so quickly—did you always know who I was?"

"No. Would I have placed you here in Mrs. Rainsford's employ, if I had known you were Ralph's sister? And how could I guess such a thing? The name of Aberley was entirely strange to me."

"Then Mrs. Burton told you!"

"She was too faithful for that!" he replied, with a slight smile. "I learned the truth, or rather took it for granted, from seeing the name of 'Meta' on one of your handkerchiefs."

She smiled in faint amusement as she said —

"It is fortunate the discovery of my secret was not of really serious import since it was so slightly guarded."

"You spoke of Marchant's telling you of the Archdale disasters. When was this? I understood he was still there when I left this morning."

A deep flush dyed Meta's fair cheek with sudden crimson, as she recalled that interview, and she began to say, in some confusion —

"He was here yesterday.—he told me—you don't think his presence there means any new disturbance?" she added in dismay.

"I fancy not! There's no more mischief the men can do now; and as the reopening of the factories is out of the question, many of them will have to go elsewhere for work."

Accepting this assurance silently, Meta rose, saying, with a little hesitation —

"I must go by the next train to Ralph; and I ought to tell Mrs. Rainsford."

"You would not have time! I will explain matters to her!" he replied hastily. "Can you be ready in half an hour?"

"In ten minutes!" she responded quickly; "but — do you mean — will you" —

She colored with fresh embarrassment, not wishing to take it for granted he meant to go back with her, but he only laughed for an instant at her doubt, and then said, with sudden gravity —

"Can I let Ralph's sister go alone on her homeward way? May I not fulfill my promise to take you myself to him who waits so impatiently for your coming?"

Her eyes drooped shyly at his look of intent earnestness, and her lips trembled as a sudden delicious sense of love and protection stole into

the lonely heart, which for so long had held itself aloof from all human ties.

Arthur Manning, looking down into her sweet, sensitive face, and seeing the tremor of strong feeling that swept over it, could with difficulty control the joyous throbbing of his pulses, as a dream of intense delight crept like a breath from Paradise into his consciousness. But in utter silence he turned away, not daring to trust himself to speak; while she, content with the new joy that was flooding her heart, hastened to make her simple preparations for the journey.

Arthur Manning found his sister in the library, busily writing letters. As she looked up in astonishment at his unexpected appearance, he said lightly —

“I do hope, Margaret, that you will forgive my just flying in and out again, but I’m off by the next train, and only want to tell you” —

“Now, Arthur,” she exclaimed impetuously, as she came forward to meet him, “don’t be aggravating! I know you haven’t seen Mabel Vane; and if you are going to break my heart” —

“My dear Margaret, have you taken leave of your senses?” he asked, in genuine surprise.

"What can Miss Vane possibly have to do with it?"

"Everything—if I had my way. You know, Arthur, I've set my heart on your marrying Mabel, and if you're thinking of"—

"Upon my word!" he interrupted, laughing heartily at her air of worried perplexity, "I do assure you, I haven't the least idea of marrying Miss Vane, or"—

He checked himself as the absurdity of the discussion struck him, and added, in a different tone—

"I only wanted to tell you, Margaret, that Mrs. Aberley must go to her brother at once."

"Her brother? I didn't know she had one!" said Mrs. Rainsford drily.

"Neither did I when she came here, or I would of course, have told you. You have heard of the Archdale factories being burned, I suppose?"

"Just a vague report. Is it true, then?"

"Too true!" he replied, with a sigh; "and Ralph Newbold was badly hurt."

"Not dangerously?"

"If he does not lose the use of his eyes, he will do well enough," answered Arthur; "but he

is very anxious to have Mrs. Aberley return at once."

"Mrs. Aberley! You don't mean to say she is that pretty Meta Newbold we used to hear so much of?"

"So it seems. Her marriage offended her brother; but he regrets now their separation, and I'm to take her back to him."

He spoke with such an air of constraint, that quick-witted Mrs. Rainsford exclaimed—

"Arthur, you can't deceive me! It's this girl that has come between you and Mabel Vane."

"Nonsense!" he replied, yet coloring deeply under her scrutinizing gaze. "There never was more than the merest friendship between Miss Vane and myself; and for the matter of that, Marchant stood a far better chance with her than ever I could have done."

"You have never fairly tried!" persisted Mrs. Rainsford. "Mabel's fancy was caught by that man's curious characteristics, but it was never a serious regard. But about Meta Newbold—I mean Mrs. Aberley—how queer it seems that she should have been my seamstress! Will you

give me your word you haven't been wooing her all this time?"

Arthur drew back with such quiet dignity that his sister felt she had gone too far with her questioning.

"Certainly! If I should ever woo my friend's sister," he said with grave reserve, "it would only be after she is under the shelter of his roof again. I'm not quite such a harum scarum fellow as you imagine, Margaret."

"It's a shame to tease you so!" she answered, with a look of penitence that disarmed his short-lived resentment at once.

He looked at his watch, and said good-by hurriedly, as he saw how late it was.

"I'd like to go down to the cottage with you!" said his sister suggestively.

"No, don't! There isn't a moment to spare," he replied, waving his hand in a final farewell, as he walked quickly down the path.

He found Meta waiting; and, by taking the short way through the woods, they easily reached the station in time.

CHAPTER XXII.

“HOW FULL LIFE IS OF MISTAKES!”

All God's angels come to us disguised;
Sorrow and sickness, poverty and death,
One after other lift their frowning masks,
And we behold the seraph's face beneath,
All radiant with the glory and the calm
Of having looked upon the front of God.

—LOWELL.

DURING the first part of their journey, Meta was so silent that her companion began to fear she was regretting the impulse which she had followed so hastily. After some moments of uneasy observation, in which she seemed so absorbed in her thoughts as to be unconscious even of his presence, Arthur said gently—

“Are you so soon repentant?”

She started, and looked sadly in his face.

"I am thinking how full life is of mistakes!" she said pensively. "We let sudden impulses outweigh all our strongest feelings."

Not yet understanding where the current of her thoughts was leading her, Arthur interposed.

"Do you feel it a disloyalty to your husband's memory, to be returning now to Ralph?"

"Oh, no!" she cried with eagerness. "How could I think that? But looking back upon the days in which we defied Ralph so madly, I see now how foolish and improvident we were—how a little patience might have won Ralph to smile, where he frowned so sternly."

"It is not easy to decide that now," replied Arthur. "It always seems to me the greatest of mistakes to waste our energies studying the past, and imagining how much better we would have arranged matters had we taken time for reflection. We look back in the light of experience, and see many things clearly that were hidden before. Be content now only to look forward, and picture to yourself the sweet content of the coming days, that you and Ralph will know better how to enjoy than you once did."

"This one thing you must tell Ralph," she said

shyly, "that I had made up my mind to return if he would have me, before you came for me."

"Why not tell him yourself?"

She shook her head mournfully. Her thoughts flew back to the child whom Ralph had never seen, whose existence he had decried so cruelly when she last saw him. Falling then into a sad reverie, from which Arthur would not again disturb her, the minutes sped quickly as they approached the familiar surroundings of Archdale.

As they alighted at the station, Arthur stopped an instant to speak to Dr. Warner. At the same moment, Marchant was about to step into the car they had left, when he recognized Meta.

"You here?" he said, flushing warmly as she held out her hand kindly, remembering only the sadness in which they had so recently parted.

"Yes!" she answered, as her eyes filled with happy tears. "I am going to Ralph. He has sent for me!"

With a smothered ejaculation of pain and rage, he almost thrust her little hand away from him, and sprang on the platform of the moving train just in time to gain a footing upon it.

Meta looked after him in momentary perplex-

ity, till she remembered his being unaware of her relationship to Ralph, and the consequent mistake he must have made as to the nature of her regard for him. The matter quickly passed from her thoughts, however, as Dr. Warner came eagerly forward to shake hands with her, while Arthur said cheerily—

“Ralph is very comfortable this morning.”

“Yes!” chimed in the doctor, rubbing his hands together with an air of intense satisfaction, and inspecting Meta’s pale face very searchingly. “He’s as comfortable as a man can be who’s worrying the life out of him. Bless my soul! Miss Meta—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Aberley, I should say. It’ll do Newbold all the good in the world to have you come to take care of him.”

“You knew”—began Arthur in surprise.

“Yes, I just wormed it out of him. I saw he was all in a fever about something, and I knew I must get him quieted down one way or another. So I talked on, touching on every subject I could think of, till he got into one of his rages—bless the hot-tempered fellow!—and said he couldn’t listen to my rubbish for thinking about his sister.

I declare when I heard that, I was only too delighted, I can tell you."

Arthur looked anxiously at Meta, fearing the good doctor's blunt speech would offend her, but she only smiled and took the old man's arm with a pretty girlish grace that was new to Arthur's knowledge of her. A strange sense of having taken up again the light-hearted joy and freedom of her girlhood came over Meta, as she walked slowly toward the home where so dear a welcome awaited her. All the days of bitter privation and sorrow which had for so long been her portion, faded into a retrospect that was more like a dream than a reality. They seemed as vanishing clouds, whose disappearance made the sun's brightness so much the more joyous, rather than the deep, unchanging shadows, in whose gloom she had sat so long, patiently weeping tears of lonely wretchedness.

As she thus mused, but not unhappily, Arthur was asking of Dr. Warner when Dr. Sherwood would see Ralph again.

"Not till to-morrow. We'll know then, I think, what chances there are for his eyesight. Well, I must leave you here," he added, as they came to

a path which diverged from that which led to the manor-house.

Nodding hastily by way of good-by, Dr. Warner hurried off toward the village, and the others continued their own way.

As Arthur's light step entered Ralph's room, the sufferer turned his head with an impatient moan, saying, feverishly —

"Is it you, Arthur? Have you heard nothing yet?"

"She is here!" replied his friend, seeing at once that no shock of joy could do the harm this cruel suspense was inflicting.

Meta, following softly in his footsteps, heard the eager question, and as Arthur signed to her to approach, she knelt by Ralph's side, not daring yet to look up at his poor bandaged face, but raining passionate tears and kisses on his hands.

"Meta!" he uttered in tones so low and faint that Arthur came forward in some alarm.

"Oh, Ralph!" she cried, venturing to twine her arms round his neck, and pressing her lips on his, "can you forgive all my rebellion?"

"Hush!" he whispered fondly, as he folded his own arms around her, and drew her head

upon his breast. "We were both hasty, both too unyielding! Let it pass forever, my little Meta! We will always now" —

He could not speak for the trembling of his lips, as many cruel thoughts surged through his mind. They had a sore task to soothe and quiet him again, so pitiable was his weakness, so terribly was he unnerved by this excitement. But when composure was restored, the glad thought that this one grief was ended and out of sight forever, brought peace to them all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“THAT'S RIGHT — THAT'S FAIR!”

Be noble! and the nobleness that lies
In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
Will rise in majesty to meet thine own.

—LOWELL.

THE days glided into weeks, and summer's fervent heat slowly yielded to the refreshing coolness of Autumn's breezy reign. Charming and peaceful as a fragment of the life in Paradise, had the tranquil hours proved to the reunited brother and sister. Physical pain, sorrow and bereavement, and the memory of past wrongs and griefs, all lost their sharpness in the sunny glory of that blest time, and became as mere shadows of the past. Meta grew bright and rosy while breathing her native air again; while Ralph's scars slowly healed into the fainter seams and

blemishes which would ever mar his face, and tell, through all the years of his life, the sad story of their causing. His eyesight was saved, after many days of keen anxiety; and having the precious boon of its restoration, he was quite content to smile at fate's lighter touch of mere disfigurement.

The strong sympathy that now existed between Meta and Arthur Manning, as it united them in the tenderest devotion to Ralph, and brought them so closely together in their care of him, became almost insensibly accepted as a token of the nearer union which their growing regard suggested. Ralph smiled with the utmost complacency at it, and thought, with ever increasing content, of the certainty it brought that both friend and sister would be ever near him in the future.

Even the simple-hearted villagers would grin in uncouth delight, and wag their heads knowingly, when they met the two together taking the brief rambles in which Ralph could not as yet share. And, in truth, no one was so unconscious whither her steps were pleasantly tending, as Meta herself. In her thoughts, she would often lay a

grateful stress on the young rector's pure disinterested friendship for her brother, and by reflection for herself, never pausing to analyze the many looks and tones which constantly betrayed the stronger feeling he would not too soon proclaim.

But with all the interest which the villagers felt in this undemonstrative courtship, it was nothing to the tumult of joy with which they hailed Ralph's reappearance among them. He had shrunk from questioning Arthur Manning as to the present condition of the people, half in proud resentment, as he remembered the wanton destruction of his factories, and partly, too, because he dreaded to hear of suffering and demoralization which he was powerless to remedy. Thus, on his first drive to the village, it was with curious, yet reluctant glances, that he surveyed the groups of loungers who were scattered here and there in the streets, or at the inn-door. Hitherto, he had only taken a few short drives, in his pony-phaeton, with Meta to drive for him, within the limit of the park. Now, as they slowly entered the village, the news of his unexpected coming passed eagerly from mouth to mouth. There was an instant's breathless pause, and a few, conscience-stricken

with the recollections of their greater offences, slipped quietly out of sight in the by-streets. But by far the greater number thronged round the carriage, waving their caps and exclaiming, exultingly —

“The master — he’s out again — God bless him! He looks most as well as ever!”

For the moment, all memory of the discords which had led to such terrible results seemed to be lost sight of by all. Those nearest to Ralph pressed forward to look eagerly into his face, and when he held out his hand, as many as could grasped it in turn, while tears of pity and regret stood in their eyes, as they saw those changed, cruelly-marred features.

Then came the tide of remembrance, surging into all their hearts with its tale of error and mad passion. The men stepped back, and looked down in a shame-faced fashion, half wondering at their daring to approach Ralph in the old kindly way, and even more at finding how strong was the impulse to do so. Ralph turned slightly toward Meta, and he motioned to her to drive on, a dark shadow coming over the face, which but now had smiled so genially at the men’s hearty greet-

ing. But as Meta's pleading eyes met his, and he remembered the dread peril through which he had so lately passed, a new and more noble impulse came with its softening influence. Looking again on his people, many of whom had grown gray in his service and in that of his father, he said in low, gentle tones, which the utter silence that prevailed made audible to all —

“We've all had a hard summer, my friends, and perhaps my trials have been the worst to bear. Let me tell you how sorry I am for yours — how entirely I forgive the mistakes which I know you have not meant to make.”

They listened to him in breathless amazement for an instant. Was this the fiery-tempered young master, whose anger all had feared, much as they loved him? Scorn and reproaches they could have steeled themselves to bear in sullen silence; but generous, kindly words like these were as keen stabs to their uneasy consciences. Again they pressed nearer to Ralph, while an old man, who seemed a leader among them said, with humble, deprecating gestures —

“We're sorry enough ourselves, sir! We've often said that better, kinder master, never was.

Maybe if they'd let us alone, and we'd kept on in the old way, it would have been best for us all."

"I've no doubt of it!" replied Ralph sadly. "But it's too late now! The factories are gone, and the old fellowship is broken. What can we do now, except to shake hands and try to be wiser in the future, whatever Providence gives us to do?"

"It's right you are!" exclaimed another, striking his fist emphatically in the palm of his other hand. "It's blamed fools we've been, as your honor says."

"I did not say that!" interposed Ralph, unable to restrain a laugh at this.

"Well, you thought it! What are we Archdale folks going to do this winter, any way? If there's no factory work, we must starve, or go away to some new place for work; we don't like that, your honor!"

"I thought your leaders paid you!" exclaimed Ralph, in great surprise at this.

"They pretend to!" said the first speaker; "but what does it amount to? It's not full wages at the best; and we're not counting idleness as an advantage. Then, they're all the time

fining or suspending us, for some fool's notion they take, that we're not doing our duty, or some fad like that. So you see, in the long run, we're sure to be pretty badly out of pocket, sir."

Ralph silently scanned those well-known faces, and seemed to be revolving a weighty problem in his mind.

Quick to catch at the merest glimmer of hope, the old man went on eagerly —

"Oh, Mr. Newbold, sir! If you'd just give us another chance — we don't want to go among strangers — the most of us was born and bred in Archdale. Don't send us away, sir!"

"But what can I do?" asked Ralph.

"Build the factories up again, sir! You'll find enough of us as will be only too glad to go to work again."

"On the old terms?" and Ralph looked searchingly into the faces nearest to him, as though watchful for one sign of vacillation.

"I can speak only for myself!" said the old man, turning to note the reception his words met with among his companions. "I will readily come back on the old terms, and be thankful, too."

A murmur of mingled assent and low-toned dis-

cussion showed the irresolution of the timid, the more ready consent of those who were only too glad to have their trouble and suspense ended.

Then Ralph, seeing the want of unanimity among them, said more gravely —

“I am not prepared yet, to consider the question of re-employing any of you. I mean to rebuild the factories, because it's the best use I can make of the insurance money. When they are finished, I will give the preference, in hiring my work-people, to all of you who have come with a clear record out of this time of trouble and disaster.”

“That means” — asked a surly-looking fellow of whom Ralph had no recollection.

“It means!” he returned sternly, “that those who had any hand in firing the factories, or were in any way instrumental in causing it, can never again find work with me.”

The man snarled ill-temperedly, and looked round for the applause and sympathy of the others. But he met only gruff, suspicious looks, which startled him into sneaking out of the way, while with sudden clapping of hands, they cried —

“That's right — that's fair!”

Ralph leaned back wearily, for he was still too weak to bear much excitement, but his face was full of a glad light, as he saw how true at heart his people proved to be even when they had been brought under so strong an adverse influence. He was again about to motion Meta to proceed, when another thought delayed him.

“Remember, my friends, I do not want you to do anything that is underhand. Whatever pledges you have made to your brotherhood, you must fulfill at all costs. If it forbids your returning to my service, remember you are under no obligation to me. Only, if you do come, do so with a clear conscience. You cannot serve two masters.”

The men looked at each other in evident disturbance at this suggestion. Exactly how they stood with the brotherhood, and whether their acceptance of its funds bound them to obey its rules, was a greater puzzle than their stolid wits could fathom. They fell into disjointed groups, arguing and wrangling over the question in deepest perplexity, feeling the more worried, in that not one of them was capable of throwing the least light on it.

Ralph was content to know which way their wishes inclined ; and he felt confident the brotherhood would be glad to get rid of members who were so great a pecuniary burden, and whose sturdy discontent brought it no glory or profit. Weary with his efforts, he only gave Meta a smile and a look of entire satisfaction, in reply to her anxious questions, as they wended their homeward way.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF HUMANITY.

When by night the frogs are croaking,
Kindle but a torch's fire —
Ha! how soon they all are silent!
Thus truth silences the liar.

—LONGFELLOW.

THROUGH the golden October days came welcome sounds that betokened the busy mechanics' steady labor, and echoed on the cool, crisp air. Once more a mighty pile of buildings proudly reared itself on the spot where so lately stood the wreck of the old Archdale factories.

Busy with this erection, and full of ardent zeal to 'give it every desirable advantage, Ralph grew stronger and brighter every day in the new content of his occupation. He said nothing to his for-

mer work-people about their proposed return to his employ, and in fact, he was not very eager to open the factories for use before spring. It amused him, however, to observe the interest they covertly displayed in the buildings, and how stealthily the more sullen of his former employés would slip away, trying to look quite unconcerned if he found them loitering in the immediate neighborhood. He comprehended the grave doubts which troubled the steadier, more thoughtful men among them, as to how far they had forfeited the right of independent action by joining the brotherhood. Feeling how salutary a sharp lesson on the subject would be, he forbore to aid them by word or look in coming to a decision. And thus, as the building progressed, the deeper grew the men's perplexity, and the more poignant were their fears lest the difficulty they had rushed into so hastily, was not to be easily shaken off.

At length, the great work was done. The last nail was driven in place, the last stroke of the paint brush had given the final touch of ornament; and now came the question whether or no the factories should remain closed during the winter.

Berkeley came hurriedly from head-quarters on being notified of the emergency. He had waited till the last moment, in hopes Marchant would join him, but this great leader had been, during all these weeks, sowing the seed broadcast over the land from whose upspringing such wonderful results were looked for. It was impossible that the telegram which had been sent could reach him in time for even the most rapid journeying to bring him to Archdale by the day appointed for meeting the former factory employés.

Berkeley, though half elated at having the management of the meeting all to himself, was yet full of a secret sense that he was incapable of conducting it to a successful result. He made serious efforts, however, to be moderate and guarded, knowing how prone he was to be violent and headstrong at the least opposition.

Calling the meeting to order, and marking the sullen discontent of many faces, the air of covert defiance displayed by others, and the evident discomfort of the timid, Berkeley made a brief address that was really a model of discretion. He told the people how well he could understand the old attachment between them and their for-

mer employer, which made each side desirous of resuming the pleasant relations of the past.

"Not by mere accident," he said, in conclusion, "have all the untoward events of the last few months occurred. If Providence had been satisfied with matters as they were, all would have gone smoothly as before. But in these days of progress, of emancipation from the tyranny of old established customs, it was needful that a fresh start should be taken here as well as elsewhere. We tried to have it amicably arranged; but with many temperaments it takes a touch of adverse ruling, sometimes a very severe one, to teach the lesson of the day. Thus, many of you have been ready to faint by the wayside; and others have fallen into evil ways, not seeing how the eyes of the world were looking to see how they bore the sharp test of idleness. The sin of destroying the factories is not the less to be censured, because it helped to teach Mr. Newbold his powerlessness to fight with the spirit of progress. He would have discerned that in the end without the commission of this wanton crime; and it must be remembered that no such criminal can be harbored within the fold of the brotherhood. If he is one of us, and

we discover his identity, we will not shield him from the punishment he merits.

"And now, to come to the question which has brought us together to-day. The factories are rebuilt. The loss was covered by the insurance, so that Mr. Newbold stands as well off to-day as he did when we first came among you. It is true, he has not made his usual profits out of the work, during these months in which it has been suspended; but for that ample amends are made, in his having these new and much finer buildings in place of the old ones.

"But you, my brothers, are not so well off. You have, more or less, felt the demoralization of idleness, and the fund distributed among you from the brotherhood has not equalled the amount you would have earned, had you gone on working on the old terms. I do not deny this. I proclaim it, on the contrary, as evidence of the fervent zeal you have for the cause, that you have even borne loss for the sake of its sacred principles. It cannot be that even the most careless and unthinking among you, will harbor now for an instant, the idea of sacrificing all you have gained or conceding what you have hitherto steadfastly maintained !

Now, when the work is ready for you, when, as I am told, Mr. Newbold has even offered it to you in advance of commencing his building, surely you will stand more determinedly than ever on your rights."

"We ain't so sure just what our 'rights', as you call 'em, are!" interposed one of his hearers impatiently. "The amount of all that palaver seems to be that we and the master has got to begin and fight it out all over again."

"If you haven't both learned the shorter way of coming to an agreement," replied Berkeley, preserving his suavity of manner with difficulty, at this.

"It takes two to make a bargain!" muttered another.

"Fortunately you haven't to consider that part of the question," went on Berkeley smoothly. "You've placed yourselves in the hands of the brotherhood, who have the ability and power to make a much safer and wiser bargain for you than you can make for yourselves."

"And hain't we nothin' to say about it?" cried a discontented voice.

"It is not necessary."

"May be it is — and may be it ain't! I like to make my own bargains. Then I know where I stand "

"Still, since you all agreed together, and took the pledge of the brotherhood," argued Berkeley, keeping his temper now with still greater difficulty, "you must surely yield to its claims and control, even as you share its benefits."

"Confound its benefits!" and the speaker savagely shook his fist in Berkeley's face. "We were better off before; and I'm clear for going back" —

"To the old servitude?" interposed Berkeley boldly, for, to do him justice, he was not in the least a coward. "Even if you could — even if we would let you — would it be right? Would it be honest?"

"Ten times more honest than to live as you fellows do, by making mischief and stirring up strife wherever you find peace and comfort. I guess it's many times one man's hard earnings that goes into the pockets of one of you preachers of what you call brotherhood."

The man who uttered this reproach had hitherto stood silent and seemingly content with

Berkeley's remarks. He was evidently one whom the others especially respected; and as he now, for the first, openly arrayed himself against the control Berkeley sought to maintain over them, a number of voices cried, roughly —

"Honest indeed! What's he mean? Who's taking aught? We're as honest as him!"

"Do you call it honest?" cried Berkeley, in a clear, ringing voice that penetrated far beyond the confines of the assembly; "do you call it honest to accept gratuitously the aid of the brotherhood, to take our time and labor in meeting you here, in organizing you into a branch of the order, and enabling you to make a successful stand against your wrongs, and to receive the contributions of hard working brothers for your support while you are waiting for your triumph? Do you call it honest, while reaping all these advantages, to be plotting against the brotherhood, to be secretly making agreements in treacherous" —

"Hold on!" exclaimed two or three at once. "Who's been taking your dirty money?"

"Why, all of you!"

"That's a lie! There ain't one of us had a penny since" —

"But it was sent—you could have had it!" muttered Berkeley, sorely confounded at this.

"We knew a little about honesty ourselves, as it happens," returned one of the men with a defiant grin. "It's pretty well all of us that's made up our minds to work for the master again, and we haven't taken any of your sneaking wages since we come to that conclusion."

"But how have you lived?"

"Oh! we got along one way or another. And now, I guess you'll take that back, won't you?" he added in tones of significant threatening.

"What?"

"That we're not honest!"

Berkeley looked into the man's face, and then glanced *searchingly* over the array of gloomy countenances which confronted him.

"Understand one thing!" he said at last very firmly, "you can't remain in the brotherhood."

"We don't want to—we've been sick of it ever so long. What's to do to get out of it? Are we to resign, or"—

"No!" and Berkeley's air of supreme authority as he spoke was really admirable. "You have nothing to resign. You ceased to be members

of the brotherhood from the moment you decided to disobey its rules."

"That's settled in short order, then! Come, boys, if we ain't anything else, we're the master's factory-boys, anyway."

With a mighty shout, they began to move in a tumultuous throng toward the manor-house, when they descried Ralph Newbold and Arthur Manning approaching from beneath a large oak tree, where they had been standing for some minutes.

"The master! The master!" cried several in delight. "We'll have another speech"—

Ralph shook his head resolutely, saying as he pointed to his friend—

"Let him speak for me! I'm not strong enough yet."

Arthur regarded Ralph doubtfully, and was inclined to refuse, also; but the recollection of some of Berkeley's last words suddenly nerved him to consent. Making a quick gesture to command silence, he began in gentle accents that sounded clearly on the still air, as the men listened with sudden reverence.

"My friends!" he said, "the instinct of brotherhood is so strongly implanted in our natures,

that we naturally turn, with eager enthusiasm, to welcome any suggestion of it. God, himself, created the great brotherhood of humanity, of which we are born members, and we never cease to belong to it. From the hour of our birth to that of our death, our duties to each other are unending. The infant's first feeble smile of recognition belongs to the mother who watches over it; the very death-scene claims from us the example of dying as worthily as we know how, that those around us may be cheered and comforted when they, too, come into the dark valley. What need, then, can there be for a number of men to band themselves together, under the name of brotherhood, assuming especial duties and obligations toward each other? They cannot, they do not pretend to, undertake more than is their duty already as human beings; and what right have they to restrict their service to those whom they choose to select? Do they not already owe every service to all mankind? And that, too, not for fear of penalty, nor in hope of reward, but as a duty to be rendered freely and heartily, even as God bestows His blessings on us.

“Be content then, my friends, with the perfect

working of God's providence, and do not lose sight of the evil that has been wrought in our midst by the scheme that seemed to you so promising. Do not even think it is all happily over, and the wrong made amends for. True, you have new factory-buildings, that are finer and more comfortable than the old ones; but they have not the precious associations which belonged to those where many of you have worked for nearly a lifetime, and where your fathers before you spent their lives in honorable labor. If, two generations hence, the workmen in these factories can show the peaceful, honest record your fathers won, if they are as happy and as surrounded by comfort as you have always been, then the lesson of to-day will not have been learned in vain. And," here Arthur Manning's voice trembled so that he could scarcely control it, "we will hope the master in those days need not stand before his people, scarred and disfigured for life, because" —

The speaker's own emotion, and the actual sobs which broke from some of the older men, checked his words for some moments, while Ralph turned aside, thoroughly unnerved. Then Arthur Manning went on —

"Forgive me, friend!" he said, with a beseeching glance at Ralph. "It needed they should have fixed in their hearts forever, the memory of what their own weak folly, in leading them to listen to the whispers of sedition, has wrought of irremediable evil. And remember, too, my friends, that as this wrong has made its mark, never to be effaced in this world, so no evil can ever be undone. Somewhere or other, its results are seen, long after the actors have themselves forgiven, and fancy the world has forgotten its results. However harmoniously your future work may be done here, its record will never go so far as the tale of this discord, or have its lasting or evil effect. You may be glad to withdraw from an experiment whose working has not been successful; but the example even of having tried it is pernicious. How can you be other than ashamed of the idleness that has been paid for by the labor of strangers?"

"The aim of this brotherhood seems to be high and pure, but it is utterly impracticable. Its institution, being of less than Divine origin, is necessarily faulty. Some discontented idler, or ambitious demagogue, may have been seized with

a temporary enthusiasm for alleviating imagined grievances. He may have been in earnest; he may have persuaded himself that his object was good and purely disinterested; but on his own lifetime, on his own efforts and on those who follow him in sincerity, or because they can make a living by it, depends the existence of the order; and with them it dies. Only God, my friends, can establish an institution that will endure. His brotherhood will last throughout eternity."

Arthur Manning paused abruptly, turning from the people as though to hide the strong feeling that had inspired his words, quiet and earnest as he had tried to make them.

The old man who had argued so boldly with Berkeley laid his hand on the clergyman's arm and detained him an instant, saying —

"Thank you, sir! That's just what we wanted. It's the best kind of a sermon, sir, that sets men to seeing for themselves where they're wrong."

Arthur Manning smiled and nodded kindly at the old man, and then taking Ralph's arm, said, as they walked away —

"You didn't mind what I said, Ralph?"

"No! It startled me, but it was right. Is the trouble all over, do you suppose?"

"It seems to be. Berkeley evidently thinks so, for he slipped off just now, looking somewhat disconcerted."

CHAPTER XXV.

A DESPERATE STRAIT.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot;
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.


— SHAKESPEARE.

NORTH and east of the peaceful, smiling valley where Archdale village was nestling cosily, and through which wound the silvery stream that glistened so brightly in the morning sun, frowning crags rose abruptly, which formed a spur of the mountain range that extended thence far to the northward. They presented on the Archdale side steep precipices that were nearly inaccessible, and offered no inducement in the way of game or of wild fruits to the adven-

turous hunters who often successfully scoured the lower declivities for one or the other. Few ever sought those heights, save the woodman, who sometimes plied his ringing axe to good purpose among the giants of the forest, that had for perhaps centuries, maintained their silent reign over those rocky fastnesses. A hut, roughly constructed from mere logs, with an inner lining and floor of hemlock boards, and a thatch of evergreen branches, that was snugly ensconced between two overhanging masses of granite, was occasionally used as a refuge from sudden storms, or as a place in which shelter from the bleak winds, or extreme cold, could be temporarily obtained. As a residence no one would ever have dreamed of using it. It was too lonely and desolate, too exposed to the inclemency of the weather, for the poorest, most forlorn wretch in Archdale to venture upon so desperate a plan. Yet, in the middle of the unusually rigorous winter that before many weeks followed upon the rebuilding of Ralph Newbold's factories, a tiny thread of smoke was seen to ascend day after day, from that primitive roof, and to twine itself fantastically among the bare, crooked branches over-

head, till it was finally lost in the blue expanse beyond. More than once, the workmen, as they went back and forth over the well-beaten path between the factories and the village, idly speculated on this sign of habitation in that lofty far-off region. Still, believing it could only be some unusually venturesome trapper of wild game, and never distinguishing any moving figures, or other evidence of the hut's being used as more than a temporary refuge, they gave the matter no further thought but went on busily with their daily tasks.

And yet, not for days, but for weeks, a hapless, wretched party had dwelt under the grim shadow of those grey rocks. John Marchant, once more an outlaw from the haunts of men, had arbitrarily brought hither his patient, long-suffering wife and child, to share the meagre subsistence and dreary discomfort of the only home he could give them. At first, prowling abroad at night, and creeping warily around the peaceful village homes, where no watchfulness proclaimed fear of loss or danger, he managed to make many craftily levied contributions from the stores of food that lay so temptingly before him. One corner of the hut



gave evidence of this success in the growing pile of potatoes, turnips, cabbages, and other vegetables which he had boldly taken under the favoring shadow of darkness. Hanging under the eaves behind the hut, were less easily procured trophies of his daring, in the shape of chickens, deftly strangled before their first alarmed cries could give token of the marauder's presence, and even whole hams stolen from the smoke-houses, with ribs of beef skillfully purloined from the very areas. The forest, with the dense shade of its foliage, gave them concealment from observation as well as supplies of firewood; and thus, but for the misery to the wife of knowing the source of their ill-gotten food, and the ever-growing dread John Marchant felt of being traced to this desolate shelter, they would not have been altogether uncomfortable.

But winter came on apace. The opportunities for committing these petty theft became more and more restricted, and were also of far greater hazard. Rapidly the accumulated stores diminished, and no way of renewing them was discoverable. As the trees lost their leaves, the danger of detection became more imminent; and with the

first light fall of snow, John Marchant's burly form stood out too clearly in relief against it, with only the bare, gaunt branches, that offered no concealment at all, over his head, for him to venture in the direction of Archdale, on his marauding expeditions. Going, therefore, further afield, creeping through the mountain defiles, and seeking his prey in the great world beyond, he made longer journeys, staying sometimes a week or more. He always brought back both food and drink, on these occasions; and while Polly plodded wearily to and fro, cooking the savory though stolen viands, from which both palate and conscience turned with revolt, her husband would crack coarse jokes over her daintiness, and drink till he was stupified by the fiery whiskey he had contrived to procure.

But the pitcher, going often to the well in safety, gets broken at last. There came a dreary, stormy night, when Polly, who had been alone with her child for ten days, saw the grim shadow of actual starvation before her. Through all the gray gloom of the sunless day, not one morsel of food had passed their lips; and if John did not return soon, she did not know how they would

meet the terrible privation which threatened them. As the evening closed in, it began to snow in such heavy masses, that a new danger filled her with terror. To be snowed up there, on that bleak, almost inaccessible mountain, meant a horrible lingering death. Already, they were nearly without fuel, and could obtain no more by their own puny efforts. And no one in all the wide world, except John, knew they were there! They must die alone and unaided, since by no wild, frenzied cries, no desperate efforts to attract attention, could they hope to rouse the far-off villagers at Archdale to come to their rescue.

Full of dreary thoughts like these, Polly tried to soothe the fretting, hungry child, and peered forth with constantly increasing anxiety. At last, through all the din of the sobbing, wailing wind, a faint sound caught her intent ear. It was unlike John's quick, vigorous step; still it came ever nearer, plunging clumsily through the snow, as though he were dragging some cumbersome burden. Then John came stumbling inside the hut, half carrying, half leading a man, the sight of whose face made Polly utter a bitter cry. With a curse and an offered blow, which she just

escaped by drawing back quickly, he ordered her to help him undress his companion and place him on the child's wretched little pallet.

"But, John" — murmured the mother tremblingly, "the poor girl will need" —

"No, she won't!" he replied, with an imprecation. "She's got to get down to Archdale, somehow."

"Oh, John! she can't; she'd never get through the snow."

"Then you must! Now don't be stupid," he added savagely. "Don't you see, Sam and I got into a scrape this time, and had to run for it? Sam's badly hurt, I'm afraid; and I've one or two scratches myself. We've just got to keep shady for a week or two, till the matter blows over; and you'll have to get something to eat down there."

"But how?"

"Oh! I've money enough," he exclaimed exultingly, as he showed a wallet well-stuffed with bills. "We haven't pulled through with empty hands."

Polly, knowing how useless it would be to argue with him, silently wrapped herself in her worn rag of a shawl, and turned toward the door.

A stifled cry from her child stopped her. The poor little thing, with very frightened looks at her father's harsh face, entreated she might go with her.

"Impossible, Maggie!" said the mother, at her wit's end with conflicting fears. "You couldn't get through the snow."

"No, take her!" said John roughly. "The snow's not so deep yet, and you'll find her handy to carry things."

Polly, silently and with piteously quivering lips, took the shawl off her own thinly-clad shoulders, and folded it closely round Maggie's shivering form. Then holding the poor little red and frost-bitten hand tightly clutched in her own, she went forth on her perilous journey.

Chuckling over her implicit obedience to his cruel mandate, John Marchant addressed himself to roughly bandaging an ugly wound in Sam's side, whence the blood had evidently been flowing freely. Stanching it after a fashion, and trying to make the nearly unconscious man take a drink of whiskey from his flask, he drank long and deeply himself, laughing in glee and renewed spirits under its influence, as he muttered—

"Now, if Polly gets those things all right, I don't care how hard it snows. To be snowed up means safety, just now; and it can't be later than to-morrow evening before George will get here. He's sure to come — Polly's name will bring him fast enough — if he only gets my letter."

Still chuckling over thoughts of future triumph, and drinking freely all the time, while at intervals he bent over Sam's recumbent form, and listened uneasily to his labored breathing, John Marchant scarcely noted the lapse of time, till a faint, gasping cry outside the door attracted his attention. Always on his guard against possible danger, he grasped a heavy stick firmly, before he withdrew the crazy board structure from the aperture it served partially to close. A gust of sharp wind whirled a cloud of icy particles into his face, and nearly blinded him. Then Polly's outstretched arms caught his with desperate force, as she staggered in, half falling against him as she did so.

"Why, Polly!" he began, and then a muttered curse broke from his lips as he dragged her inside, with Maggie feebly clinging to her arm, so that he could again shut out the fierce storm.

It needed but the few broken gasps she could

utter, to show that after a frightful contest with the wild storm and ever increasing drifts of snow, she had been driven back, glad to regain even that rude shelter. Giving her a brutal kick, as she crept, panting with exhaustion, into the heap of straw she called her bed, while trying to warm and silence in her arms the half-frozen Maggie, John said furiously —

“Well, you’ll have to go in the morning. And you’d better not come back empty-handed again, or it’ll be worse for you!”

With daylight, however, came the sight of huge drifts of snow, that presented a broad expanse for many hundred yards in every direction, whose depth made it an impassible barrier. The storm still prevailed, and without food or fuel, their extremity was pitiable indeed.

Hour after hour passed in dreary waiting. Knowing that George, if he reached Archdale, would contrive to make his way to them in spite of all obstacles, John cared little for one day’s privation of food. But the cold was intense. The little handful of embers in the fire-place was fast turning into gray ashes, and not a fragment of fuel remained. For once, his savage curses

could not rouse Polly, who lay shivering and moaning, with Maggie tightly clasped in her arms. The feet of both were too badly frozen to permit their standing, and their sufferings were terrible. The man Sam scarcely moved. He breathed heavily, and seemed to be fast failing. Left thus to his own devices, John boldly plunged into the outer snow, hoping to find at least a branch, or some bits of broken wood. Coming back in a few minutes from the vain quest, with numb, half-frozen fingers, he desperately tore some of the boards from the floor, and tried to break them into fire-wood. He partly succeeded only to find that not a spark remained to kindle the fragments, nor could a match be found in the house. Then he threw himself on the floor and fairly raved in his impotent despair. Night came, and his last hope expired. The brother, in whose goodness this bad man so curiously trusted, had failed him! Thus three days and nights of hopeless agony slowly passed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FROM THE ASHES OF DEAD HOPES.

Against the darkness outer
God's light his likeness takes,
And He, from the mighty doubter,
The great believer makes.

—R. W. GILDER.

ON the fourth day, John Marchant dragged himself to his feet, and again looked long and anxiously over the unbroken expanse of snow, that now sparkled cheerily in the glowing sunlight. The storm was over at last; and in the bright light of day it seemed impossible not to believe that succor must be coming some how. Realizing now the tremendous mass of snow that had fallen during this protracted storm, he tried to calculate what detentions of trains might have occurred to delay George's coming; and again the

only faith this man had ever cherished, his blind trust in the brother he had so outraged and deceived, faintly revived his hope of rescue even yet. But he was terribly exhausted by his long struggle with cold and hunger. The others, half dead already, and supinely yielding to their privations till they were but dimly conscious of them, suffered far less than this strong man who fought so desperately against his fate. He was growing very weak, however, and with a sudden horrible faintness that felt terribly like death itself, he turned away moaning, as he sank feebly on the floor.

But even then, one moment's longer gaze, had his eyes been keen enough to discern him, would have shown him his brother, just alighting at Archdale from the incoming train.

George Marchant, wearied and overwrought with many varied excitements, looked so changed, so haggard and careworn, that the station-master, full of a sudden sense of pity and concern, eagerly greeted him, shaking his hand heartily as he said —

"Bless me, Mr. Marchant, sir! I hardly knew you! It's many a month since you've been here."

Marchant smiled languidly as he answered —

“Yes, Jones. I’ve been pretty much all over the country since I saw you. How’s all the world here?”

“Oh, we’re doing blithely, sir!” returned Jones cheerily. “You’ve heard about the factories?”

Marchant checked him with an annoyed gesture.

“Tell me about Mr. Newbold!” he said shortly. “He was hurt” —

“He’s well over that!” interposed Jones, feeling that the subject was not a pleasant one for Marchant. “Leastways his face is scarred, to be sure, but he is too happy this day to mind that.”

“Happy?” echoed Marchant in puzzled tones.

At this moment a merry peal of bells rang from the church tower in the village, and the faint acclaim of distant voices sounded in muffled softness over the snow.

“Do you hear that?” exclaimed Jones exultingly. “It’s the Squire’s sister — bless her sweet face — that’s married this day.”

“Sister!” repeated Marchant mechanically; “I didn’t know he had a sister.”

“Her that was Mrs. Aberley, you know.”

“Mrs. Aberley!” and Marchant’s lips trembled

and whitened with the shock. "His sister!" he added, half to himself—"oh, what a fool!—and who does she marry?" he continued, turning sharply to the astonished station-master.

"Marry?" he stuttered confusedly; "why! our Mr. Manning—the rector—to be sure."

Marchant turned away abruptly, leaving Jones very much perplexed indeed.

Striding with vehement haste through the village streets, Marchant clenched his hands with passionate force as he recognized his utter defeat in every avenue his will or his ambition had entered upon. The smiling contented faces in the cottage windows, or on the street, the huge mass of factory buildings which presently rose upon his sight, as he left the gay thoroughfare, all showed that peaceful prosperity had returned to the homes whence in his mad zeal he had sought to effectually drive it. Meaning honestly to do these people good, he had nearly ruined them. He had called them "brothers" in the hour of their tribulation; and only in shaking off his influence, which had been so pernicious, had they found comfort again. He had hated Ralph Newbold with an unreasoning hatred, and

could have joyed in his destruction, while shrinking from dealing a vengeful blow with his own hand. And now, too late for any further cherishing of his wild dream, he learned that Meta was Ralph's sister. He saw that the one faint chance that might ever have existed for him, would have been in his rendering such true, loyal service to Ralph, as might have won Meta's grateful regard. Instead of which, he had gloried in opposing him, had led by his wonderful eloquence the multitude of unthinking men, who had wrought so much of woe and suffering to the master whose rule had been ever just and reasonable. Everywhere he was defeated. His love for Meta, his devotion to the brotherhood, both recoiled in cruel disappointment upon his own heart, which sat mourning in the ashes of its dead hopes.

"Well!" he cried, at length, lifting his pale, anguished face toward the smiling skies, and then gazing sadly on the dark cliffs above him, "the brotherhood I have tried to create fails miserably at the very moment that success seemed certain—the woman I have loved is lost to me forever—what then? I have still the brother that

Heaven gave me — poor sinful wretch that he is! I will abandon my self-chosen duties, and fulfill the one I have hitherto despised."

He looked resolutely toward the spot where he knew the hut which sheltered John must be; and then with sudden alarm, swept the whole face of the cliffs with his eager glance. No! he was not mistaken. He had known well enough where to look for it, as he now saw, when he at last detected the outline of its roof against the gray rocks. But how fearfully deep must be the snow-drifts which concealed all else from his view! Mad now with keenest fear and apprehension, Marchant took in the whole situation at once, and saw how immediate his action must be. Knowing every crag and precipice throughout those hills, he plunged rapidly forward, half running in his eagerness, till he encountered too great a depth of snow to keep on in a straightforward direction. Then, turning hither and thither, as more sheltered spots gave him surer foothold, he soon reached a nearly continuous line of rocks, whose surface, swept bare by the mighty winds, offered a narrow and dizzy pathway, which not many would have ventured to tread.

Following it fearlessly, however, and sometimes springing from one point of rocks to another over treacherous masses of snow whose depths would surely have engulfed him had he made one misstep, Marchant at length stood on an eminence that nearly faced the little hut, and was not many yards distant from it. Here, panting and breathless with his violent exertions, he paused to consider how he should next proceed. The roots of an overturned tree at his feet, which had fallen in the direction he wished to take, suggested his creeping along its trunk, whose position was shown by the straggling branches, although it was buried nearly a foot beneath the snow. Succeeding in this enterprise, he was now on a ledge of rocks, which offered a narrow pathway ending just over the roof of the hut. From there, springing into the mass of snow before the doorway, and vigorously trampling it under foot, he turned to open the door just as John, half frightened, half delighted at the sound of his approach, came timidly to scrutinize the new-comer.

"George!" he gasped, with parched, quivering lips. "My God! Is it you?"

George Marchant nodded somewhat curtly, and

regarded the wasted, shivering figure with a perplexed glance.

"It's something new to hear your lips calling on God!" he said ungraciously.

"It's enough to make a devil cry for help!" muttered John brokenly, with a glare in his eyes that Marchant visibly shrank from. "George!" he went on in a piteous whisper, "we're starving and freezing!"

"We!" cried Marchant; "who do you mean?"

"Why, Polly and the child!" whined John. "I told you" —

"Yes, but I thought it was one of your cursed lies. Polly — here!"

He pushed John roughly aside and entered the hut. It was so dark, from the mass of snow that excluded the light on every side, that he stumbled forward, not seeing anything at first. Then, distinguishing the dim outline of a woman's form huddled up in one corner, he knelt down in too great terror for words, as he laid his hand on the thinly-covered shoulders. He braced himself for the icy touch of death as he did so, but at once the figure shivered slightly, while a low moan broke from its lips.

"Polly!" he whispered tenderly, bending down in a vain effort to see her face. "Don't you know me, Polly? It's George."

"George!" she muttered piteously, turning toward him with an effort that showed how completely exhausted she was. "George, we are starving!"

With a groan of bitter pain he caught her hands in his.

"I will get you food at once," he said eagerly. "Try to bear it just a little longer. And your little girl?" he added hesitatingly

"I'm trying to keep her warm," gasped Polly, with a faint sense of comfort in his words.

Becoming more used to the dim light, Marchant now saw that Polly was holding Maggie's motionless form closely to her bosom. One touch satisfied him that the poor child had already succumbed to her sufferings, and had probably been dead for hours. Not daring to tell Polly this till he had procured assistance as well as food, he rose hastily, to take at once his hazardous way back to Archdale.

As he did so his foot struck against the prostrate form of Sam in the other corner.

"Who's this?" he asked sternly, of John.

"That? Oh! that's—well, there's no harm in telling you now; that's Sam Fielding!"

"Sam Fielding?" repeated Marchant, bending down to look keenly in the man's face. "I thought so! He's the scamp that fired the factory buildings."

John nodded gruffly.

"And how is it you are harboring such a rascal?"

"Oh, him and me's been working together a good deal lately."

"Working!" exclaimed Marchant scoffingly.

"Yes, working!" returned his brother defiantly. "Hard work it was, too. But you needn't fret about him now; he's dead enough."

"Dead!" and Marchant stepped back with a look of repulsion.

At this instant the faint, sweet jangling of distant sleigh-bells smote upon the still air. Marchant turned mechanically to the door, and John followed him.

Far away, beyond the unbroken snow-drifts, they could discern a sleigh with gayly-caparisoned horses just leaving Archdale, and turning into a

mountain road that passed almost under their feet. John Marchant half forgot his hunger as a look of devilish glee came into his face.

"It's the manor-house sleigh!" he exclaimed eagerly. "They don't know of the broken bridge."

"Where?" exclaimed his brother breathlessly.

John only pointed with shaking fingers to a ravine just below them, chuckling horribly the while.

Marchant made one mad plunge into the snow, and, by sheer force, swung himself headlong down the rocks, to meet the sleigh that came so gayly and with such fatal speed on its hazardous way.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“WAS IT A MISTAKE?”

Fate has carried me
‘Mid the thick arrows; I will keep my stand,
Nor shrink and let the shaft pass by my breast
To pierce another.

—GEORGE ELIOT.

MARCHANT, by dint of desperate scrambling, managed to reach the further side of the ravine just as the spirited horses came prancing gayly down the slope toward it. There was no sign of danger to warn them; for the bridge, having fallen into the narrow gorge it had spanned, was buried far out of sight by the immense snow-drift which now filled the opening completely, and presented a treacherous surface of unbroken smoothness.

Panting and breathless with his tremendous exertions, Marchant vainly sought by shouting, to attract the attention of the merry party to the fatal peril before them. Finding a husky gasp was all the sound he could make, he strove by waving his arms, as he stood in the middle of the narrow roadway, to compel their notice; but only when he sprang forward and caught the horses' bridles, holding them by main force on the very verge of the unsuspected precipice, did the occupants of the sleigh look with startled amazement on the seeming madman before them.

Indicating by one eloquent gesture the appalling danger at their very feet, Marchant was exerting all his great strength to hold in check the powerful horses, who were struggling mightily in his grasp. In the mad terror inspired by the suddenness of his onslaught, they nearly dragged him off his feet; and for one terrible instant it seemed that even yet they would all be precipitated into the perilous gulf before them. But the coachman, seizing the one moment in which the horses paused to gather strength for a new plunge, sprang to the ground and came to Marchant's aid, just as his muscles were giving way under

the frightful strain. The man's familiar voice, as well as his steady grasp, quickly controlled the half-maddened steeds; and as Marchant's arms fell powerless by his side, the sharp battle was ended, and the danger over.

Faint and dizzy with his violent efforts, his pulses throbbing irregularly, and his blood surging in fierce waves through his veins, Marchant looked in bewilderment in Ralph Newbold's face, as he sprang eagerly from the sleigh and came to his side.

"Marchant!" he said with strong emotion, as he held out his hand, "for the second time you have saved my life at the risk of your own—and this time those who are dearest to me owe you their safety, also. You must not refuse my hand again!"

Seeing that Marchant stood motionless, making no response in word or gesture to his appeal, Ralph, half hurt, half wondering at his apathy, went on more earnestly—

"Surely you have no need to cherish any resentment toward me! I who"—

"Are you so forgiving?" muttered Marchant, in low, gasping tones, as he raised his heavy eyes

to Ralph's cruelly scarred face. Something in the kindly glance which met his own, drove away the last remnant of his long-cherished ill-will, and slowly grasping Ralph's still outstretched hand, he held it with a strong yet nerveless clasp, as he added huskily—

“You have defeated me once more.”

Not quite comprehending this, Ralph drew him toward the sleigh, where Meta and Arthur Manning were still seated, saying cheerily—

“Come, and let my sister thank you, too.”

It puzzled Ralph, not knowing of their former acquaintance in Fairfield, to see Meta's cordially extended hands, and to hear her gentle words of friendly greeting. But it was too bitterly cold for any unnecessary inaction; and as the coachman had contrived to detach the horses from the sleigh, and had led them back a few steps, the others now turned the sleigh round again. This was easy enough with only Meta's light weight in it; and as the coachman refastened the traces, Ralph said to Marchant—

“We were on our way by the mountain road, to meet a southern train at Aborford. We'll have to hurry back now to Archdale to catch the

evening train there. Will you not ride with us? You see we can easily make room for you."

Marchant hesitated, and then said briefly—

"I want to get food for some poor starving creatures up there!" pointing to the hut among the rocks above. "I suppose"—

Here Meta interrupted him eagerly, saying—

"How fortunate! We've some sandwiches and fruit here, that we thought we would need on our long drive. Will you take them? We can send more from Archdale."

"But how can you get up there?" asked Ralph wonderingly.

"I can manage that!" answered Marchant, taking the basket from Meta's hand with a look of gratitude that brightened up his sombre face. "I know every rock and turn here."

"I'll send some men over to open the drifts," added Ralph, as he again seated himself in the sleigh. "You are sure you won't go with us?"

"No! I must go back at once," answered Marchant, to whom a new perplexity now suggested itself. It might be a cruel kindness to open a path to the hut, only to put John again within reach of the law's merciless grasp. By

deferring that he could give John a chance to escape; and, after all, assistance was not now immediately needed. "I have enough, thanks to your kindness," he added, "to make them comfortable to-night; and it's too late for your men to do any good now. Send them in the morning, if you will. It will be a long day's work to dig through these drifts."

In spite of their haste, a strange reluctance came over the little party, as they turned for a last look at the sturdy form, which stood so inertly by the road-side. It could scarcely be a hardship for one so used to rough experiences and exposure to all weather, to scramble back to the hut with his supply of food for its starving inmates; yet a sense of strong pity came into those hearts, that were still beating quickly with the knowledge of their narrow escape from a great danger, and were full of warm gratefulness for the inestimable service Marchant had rendered them.

Arthur Manning, all unconscious how his aspect of quiet joy was a cruel mockery to the unhappy man, whose rivalry he had never dreamed of, shook his hand with a few words of kindly gentleness, while Ralph said, in low earnest tones —

"Let us be friends, Marchant! The one vexed question that has come between us is at rest now, and through it all I have not failed to recognize the sincerity of your zeal, however mistaken it was."

Marchant, holding his hand warmly, said with an air of weary dejection —

"Was it a mistake? I have feared it — and yet — I gave my whole life to it."

He turned away with a faint moan, and again that look of dazed uncertainty came into his eyes. Mechanically he took Meta's hand, and regarded her intently as she smiled so pleasantly and with such gentle sympathy upon him; and he looked after them, when they drove off in haste, with an expression of renewed eagerness.

Meta, glancing back as they turned a corner, whence she could once more catch a glimpse of Marchant, wondered to see him still standing, with his face toward them, and the basket she had given him held in both hands.

"I wish we had made him come with us!" she said uneasily. "It is horrible to leave him there in that dreary place!"

"It is best for the poor creatures he wanted

food for?" said Ralph reassuringly, yet secretly sharing in her misgivings. "I wonder who they are!"

A moment more, and the sleigh was out of sight, but Marchant still stood where they had left him. With that fatal self-confidence which was the master-spirit of the man, and ever worked ruin to himself and those he sought to serve, he had trusted to the unaided strength and vigor, which had been already so overtaxed, for carrying succor to the unfortunate sufferers in the hut. It seemed but a simple thing to do, after the greater task in which he had so triumphantly succeeded. Only to climb once more over the rocks, as soon as he had taken a brief rest, as soon as that labored, painful throbbing of his pulses was quieted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I MUST NOT REST YET."

God's finger touched him and he slept.

—TENNYSON.

It is the cause, and not the death, that makes the martyr.

—NAPOLEON.

AT length, with a shiver that shook him strongly from head to foot, Marchant braced himself for renewed effort. Turning with a weary sigh from the scene which seemed so desolate since the sleigh had passed utterly from his sight, and the faint jangling of the bells no longer echoed over the snow, he took one irresolute step forward, muttering gloomily —

"The man I have always hated — how strange that I should save his life again — and hers! Oh, if fate had but given me one thing that I have

desired! If she could have loved me—or my work—my life-work—if it could have succeeded! But they whom I have toiled so earnestly to benefit have only suffered evil at my hands. They despise the labors whose result their own folly has marred. I could have given my heart's blood in their service, and yet they regard me as an enemy. I have tried to be a Providence to them, and God's providence has taken my work out of my hands. So it all ends! I wonder what is left for me to do in this queer world, after I've taken this food to Polly? Ah, Polly! are you wondering where I am?"

He looked despairingly at the ragged rocks, the steep cliffs and the huge masses of snow over which he had plunged in such headlong speed on his errand of mercy. It was not so very far. In his younger days, he would have made his way over far greater obstacles in less time than he now wasted, as he gazed upward with heavy, lustreless eyes, and scanned the difficult route before him.

"Polly!" he murmured mechanically, as he took another step, and then paused uncertainly. He ached horribly in every nerve and muscle

from the immense exertions he had made; and these few moments of standing in the intense cold, which grew ever more bitter as the twilight gathered round him, had stiffened and numbed his overstrained limbs till he could scarcely move.

"Polly!" he whispered again to himself, his voice taking a softened, tender tone. "I must not lose any time, my poor Polly!"

He staggered clumsily forward, while a faint consciousness stole over his benumbed senses that the task before him was no longer possible. He was too utterly exhausted for the simplest effort, and his labored breathing grew terribly painful in the still, cold air.


"I will rest!" he muttered languidly, and turned toward a fallen tree by the road-side. "No!" he added, with a startled cry, looking vaguely in every direction, and making an effort to rouse himself from the fatal lethargy that was stealing over him. "I must keep on! I must find Polly," he added drearily; "I must not rest yet."

He struggled desperately with his growing weakness, and moved a few steps nearer the ravine into which he must descend to cross it.

The wind was less sharp and penetrating under the shelter of the bank ; and a faint sense of relief inspired him with a temporary energy. Half creeping over the steep slope, and dragging his numbed limbs wearily after him, he reached a spot where the bent and twisted branches of a tree offered a natural seat. He looked about him curiously. How well he knew the place ! How often as a boy he had played here ! Memory and association were very keen in this man of strong passions and violent enthusiasms. Forgetting all else, he twined one arm round the interlaced branches, and sank into the seat with a contented sigh of relief. Leaning back against the rock which overshadowed him, he closed his eyes, murmuring softly —

“Just a moment’s rest, and then — Polly ! I must go to Polly.”

The brief twilight of the short winter’s day faded rapidly before the cheerless gloom of the bitter, frosty night. Huge clouds gathered in stormy array, shutting out the friendly glimmer of the stars. The fierce winds drove the whirling masses of snow round the silent slumbering form, which drooped lower and lower in the little nook



under the rock till it lay crouching upon the very ground. Hour after hour passed. Still, in seemingly happy, dreamless sleep, Marchant rested beneath the dark shadows. His rugged form took an attitude of deep repose, the hard lines in his face softened into utter content, and as the pure snow drifted over him, he slumbered beyond all waking.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF DEATH.


On the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.

— LONGFELLOW.

Death hath so many doors to let out life.

— BEAUMONT-FLETCHER.

WITH the earliest dawn the eager rescuing party, sent by Ralph to succor the occupants of the hut, started bravely forth in the very teeth of the freshly-raging storm. The snow fell in dense wreaths, which the strong wind carried in every direction, making drift upon drift, till all access to the cliffs by the usual route became more impossible than ever. The Archdale men, however, were not to be thus baffled on the hills where every foot of ground was so familiar to



them. Creeping along the more sheltered slopes, and making a circuit to avoid the drift which Marchant had crossed so daringly, they contrived, after many hours of exposure to that icy tempest, to reach the hut. The snow was piled higher than ever against the door which was slightly ajar; and it had drifted through the opening so much that, at first sight, the wretched little building seemed utterly deserted.

But another glance suggested a horror, which made those rough workmen turn pale, and draw back for an instant in deadly fear. Under the irregular undulations of the snow, the sharp, wasted outlines of human figures were too distinct to be mistaken. The possibility that life was not extinct compelled a hasty brushing aside of the soft, white mantle that concealed the gaunt misery beneath.

Sam Fielding's body, still clothed in his blood-stained garments, and rigid with death's icy touch, was the first the men came to. With scant ceremony, they merely assured themselves that he must have been dead some days; and then with more reverent mien they turned to where Polly tranquilly lay with little Maggie still clasped

closely to her breast. Her worn-out frame had an air of utter repose, and her lips were parted with a half smile, as though the valley of the shadow of death had been to her a welcome transition from the woes of her life.

The men looked at each other with new bewilderment, as they saw no sign of Marchant anywhere. That he must have reached the hut seemed certain; but why, if he found he was too late with his supply of food, had he not returned to Archdale with the intelligence? They dared not lose a moment in idle wondering, however. The pathway they had made through the snow would soon be obliterated by the storm, and only two hours of daylight now remained. With gentle touch they lifted Polly's light form, and with Maggie still clasped in her arms, for they could not loosen her rigid grasp, they carried them forth from the rude dwelling which had so long sheltered them. The men had to relieve each other by turns in carrying so awkward a burden over the rough, narrow way before them; and they made no pretense of taking Sam Fielding's body, also. They knew their task was perilous enough as it was, and had no mind to increase

its risks for the sake of one whom they had not failed to recognize.

Ralph Newbold, watching for the men's return in great anxiety, was startled at the gloomy looking procession which at last came in sight. In spite of the fierceness of the storm he hastened to meet them; and as they laid their sad burden down, and uncovered those pinched, wasted features, he looked in wonder at their unknown outlines. What interest could Marchant have had in their existence?—and where was he himself?

“Were there only these?” he asked.

The men hesitated, and at last one answered—

“Sam Fielding is up there yet, sir. We couldn't carry more than these two.”

“Sam Fielding?” repeated Ralph thoughtfully.

“Yes, sir! 'Twas him that fired the factories.”

Ralph turned away with lowering brow.

“Do you know this woman?” he asked, after a moment, looking again on that placid face, whence the lines of care and suffering were so fast fading away.

They all shook their heads in solemn denial.

“Was Sam married? Might it be his wife?” questioned Ralph again.

"Not likely!" replied the former spokesman, with a queer smile. "Sam was a rough rascal, sir, and this woman has been a good bit above such as he."

"And you saw nothing of Mr. Marchant?"

"He must have come back last night, sir. What would he stay there for?"

Ralph saw that Polly, with her child still folded in her arms, was duly cared for, and then dispatched some others of his workmen for Sam Fielding's body. It was sorely against their will, for in their resentment for his having destroyed the factories, they grudged him even decent burial. But Ralph silenced their grumbling with a word.

"Remember!" he said, more sadly than reproachfully, "his act was but the result of your own folly. It was you who put the temptation before him — you to whom he looked for appreciation and applause."

"Do you think Mr. Marchant was helping him to hide up there?" asked the agent Stanton, as the men went off on their dreary errand.

Ralph paused an instant at this suggestion.

"No!" he said emphatically. "Marchant was

not that sort of a man. He really believed in his pernicious doctrines, and thought that by advocating them, he was advancing the work-people's interests. But actual crime he would never have countenanced."

"Still, it is odd he should have made so great an effort" —

"He was just the man to carry out any plan, especially one of benevolence, at the utmost risk. His misdirected genius, in a legitimate avocation, would have made for him a name that future ages might have honored."

"As it is" —

"As it is," repeated Ralph sadly, "his impulses were nobler than his teachings. He has done some brave deeds, as it were, by accident, while he gave his whole life to a vain dream; and the fabric he has labored to raise on a baseless foundation, must fall by its own weight into fragments, whenever the master-spirit's hand is withdrawn."

The three hapless victims of the storm were interred the next day in the church-yard. Polly's grave was marked by a cross, fit emblem of the life whose sufferings ended so terribly, but no

name was inscribed on it, no record of that sad existence was ever known.

Sam Fielding, embruted specimen of the lowest, most degraded rank of humanity, received the charitably Christian burial which seemed a mere mockery for one whose crimes were so many, whose hands, even in death, were stained with the blood he had shed in that last affray, where his own death-wound had been received.

And Marchant—the man of great aims and lofty enthusiasms, the burning zealot for mankind's advancement, the daring contemner of existing institutions—was still

“Unknelled, uncoffin'd, and unknown.”

Months afterward, when the vast snow-drift was rapidly melting away beneath the ardent rays of the April sun, and workmen were sent to repair the broken bridge, they found him resting calmly under the shelter of the rock, even as he had fallen asleep in the midst of that wild storm. No longer was his face full of ardor and excitement, as men had oftenest known it in the day of his career as a reformer. Now, wearing a smile as gentle and peaceful as a child's, seeming

to have just fallen asleep in mere weariness, and with Meta's basket held by both hands against his breast, he rested forever.

Meta, remembering that he had loved her, and dimly comprehending the faithful strength of his nature, wept mournfully at the burial of this man, who had had such numerous followers, who had won applause in many far-distant scenes, and yet had not had one true friend, nor ever known the joys of home life.

They placed him by Polly's side, since to her seemed to have been given his last thoughts, and that in seeking to give her aid he had lost his own life. But the tie which really bound them, the love of his early youth, or the protecting care he sought to give his brother's wife, none ever knew.

John Marchant disappeared from the haunts of his associates that eventful night, as thoroughly as though he also had been engulfed in the mighty snow-drift. Whether, as his brother did not return, he feared treachery from him or discovery by those of whom he stood so much in dread, and thus contrived to crawl into some place of safety, can never be known. In his condition,

weak from want of food, and with his slight wounds untended, he could only by a miracle have survived the storm to whose mighty force his brother had succumbed. And yet even such a miracle was not impossible. It is not always the faltering, broken-down creature that first lays down the burden of life. It is not always the fierce tempest that scatters ruin and desolation over the world. Sometimes it is from the grasp of the keenest lover of life that existence is remorselessly dashed. Sometimes in the brightest sunshine lurks the deadly foe; even as there have been

“Ships that have gone down at sea,
When heaven was all tranquillity.”

THE END.

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